

TAMING RIKI

VOLUME ONE

WRITTEN BY:
KIRA TAKENOUCHI

TAMING RIKI

VOLUME 1 - PART 1

間の楔



きら たけのうち

KIRA TAKENOUCHI

Riki's Punishment

“I have told you before,” Iason sighed, “not to make me repeat myself.”

Riki shook his head defiantly, refusing to move from the corner where he huddled, trying to hide his nakedness from the imposing Blondie. Wearing nothing but chains, he had now been subjected to Iason's scrutiny for days, forced to copulate on command with a frequency enabled by the G-wave emission capabilities of the D-type pet ring. Those same G-wave properties could be used to torture him with pain and unconsummated sexual torment, and were in sync with his own brain waves, making even rebellious thoughts a source of certain punishment.

“Very well. I have given you ample opportunity to obey, Riki. It seems I shall have to discipline you.”

Iason's gentle voice seemed to Riki strangely incongruent with the full meaning of his words, and he felt something that was becoming all too familiar when it came to this Blondie--fear. Pulling his knees to his chest and burying his head on his arms, he waited for the inevitable discipline of the pet ring. When nothing happened, he peeked up to see that Iason had risen and pressed the intercom that summoned Daryl. Daryl immediately entered the room, cowering obsequiously before his master.

“Yes, Iason-sama,” he said nervously, head bowed.

“Daryl. Unfortunately Riki has chosen to disobey me again. I have decided that you will administer the punishment.”

“Yes,” Daryl said, glancing anxiously at Riki.

Iason opened a small drawer that was concealed beneath the desk that housed his intercom and communications system, and pulled out a kasey-whip, a flexible rod that was used for corporal punishment of pets and Furniture; it rarely needed to be used, and to be whipped was considered quite shameful. Daryl drew in his breath instinctively as Iason stood for a moment, gently tapping the whip against his left hand.

“Riki,” Iason said softly. “Are you ready to be whipped?”

All the frustration and rage at being held captive by Iason seemed to converge and rise inside him at once. Riki's head shot up defiantly, hatred flashing in his eyes. “Go ahead, do what you want, get it over with! Anything's better than putting on a show for you, ya perverted bastard.”

Daryl visibly cringed at these words, taking a step back and looking apprehensively at Iason.

Iason was silent for a moment, then laughed softly. “Unfortunately for you, your role as a performer isn't over yet tonight. Daryl will be helping you on that point; but first, he will be giving you a lesson you won't soon forget. Daryl.”

“Yes?”

Iason held out the kasey-whip, and Daryl rushed to retrieve it, unable to make eye contact with the towering Blondie.

“Riki,” Iason said sternly. “Lie facedown on the bed.”

For a moment Riki contemplated resisting, but an immediate sting from the pet ring convinced him of the futility of that option. Shoulders humped, he made his way to the bed, his chains clinking and dragging along the floor. As he neared the bed he shot Iason an evil stare and felt his stomach clench when Iason smiled slightly in response. He crawled on the bed and lay down on his stomach as instructed, and waited.

Intentionally drawing out the matter, Iason slowly found his chair and crossed his legs gracefully, resting his gloved hands on his knees. “Turn your head this way,” he said. “I want to see your face.” Riki complied with reluctance, not wanting him to see his face

contort with pain; that would give the Blondie too much satisfaction. But that, of course, was exactly what Iason had in mind.

For some moments Iason simply looked at him, his eyes moving along mongrel's beautiful body, his radiant, silky skin gleaming, his taut muscles flexing with the slightest movement. It would be a shame to mark it with the fruits of discipline, but there was no other way to make Riki understand his position. In truth, Iason knew it should have been done before--certainly no other pet in Tanagura spoke to his master the way Riki did. He had put it off, perhaps out of affection for the strange little mongrel, whose defiance and spirit fascinated him. But it was time they made some progress, and he had grown tired of Riki's obstinacy. Every pet, even Riki the Dark, should know his place.

"What are you waiting for," Riki growled. "Get it over with already."

"It will be over when I say it's over. And it will begin when I say it begins." Iason deliberately waited a few additional minutes, watching Riki's growing impatience and frustration with some amusement. "If you understood what was coming, you would not be so impatient for it," he said, then, "Daryl."

"Yes."

"Show no mercy."

Daryl nodded, then moved to the side of the bed, and glanced up at Iason for permission to begin. Iason nodded, and Daryl's strike came down lightning fast, lashing the back of Riki's thighs. Riki's buttock muscles clenched, but he made no sound, and his face betrayed no sign of pain.

"Harder," Iason said.

At the second strike, a small sound came from the prostrate mongrel, and he cringed. As stroke after stroke made its mark, Iason watched Riki's expressions become increasingly contorted, and his utterances more pronounced, until he cried out openly. Eventually the cries merged with pleading, as Riki begged helplessly for the whipping to cease.

"Please....please," Riki cried, looking imploringly at Iason.

"Don't stop," Iason said when Daryl gave him a questioning look.

Riki's cries pierced Iason, but he knew that unless he was given an extreme lesson, Riki would never learn what it meant to be a pet. "From this I hope you've learned something about obedience," he said. "I'm sure you don't want this experience repeated again."

Then, raising a hand to signal a stop to the discipline, he finally gave the mongrel the relief he begged for. Riki's sobs filled him with pity; his pet had certainly been whipped--his buttocks and thighs were covered with welts and lashing marks. Iason fervently hoped he would never have to repeat the lesson again. As Riki's sobs subsided finally, the punished pet lay limply on the bed, his eyes starting to glass over.

"Daryl."

"Yes?" Daryl said.

"I'll take that now," he said, nodding towards the kasey-whip still in Daryl's hand. Riki's eyes grew wide with fear, making Iason smile. "You needn't worry. You've been sufficiently punished. I'm returning this to the drawer, where I hope it will remain."

Iason felt a surge of affection for his pet when his eyes betrayed obvious relief at his master's words.

"Now, Riki, since you're so reluctant to provide the stimulation I asked for, Daryl is going to help you copulate. Then maybe next time you won't be so resistant to my orders. Turn over on your back...no," Iason paused, considering the pain of Riki's punishment, "stand up."

Riki complied, wincing as he moved, his head bowed in defeat.

Daryl looked at Iason, who nodded at him. "Do whatever's necessary."

Iason watched Riki as Daryl began stimulating him, first with his hand and then, on his knees, with his mouth. At first the mongrel seemed shamed by Daryl's administrations, keeping his head down and eyes closed. But then his manner changed with the assault of pleasurable sensations, and he threw his head back, gasping. Iason felt a surge of carnal excitement, and he once again

found that he had the perverted desire to take his own pet, this beautiful dark-haired mongrel whose every move seemed to arouse him. He removed his right glove, unfastened his trouser flap, and slid his hand around his own immense organ, already engorged with his lust. With slow strokes, he brought himself nearly to his peak just watching Riki's increasing arousal. The sight of Riki's throat, when his head was thrown back, was especially enticing; when he saw his pet reach down to rest his hands on Daryl's head, he had to stop to keep from ejaculating. He wanted to wait. Then, as Riki's gasps suddenly increased in frequency and volume, and finally Riki began arching his back, Iason knew it was time. As Riki's cries filled the room, he released his own pent-up lust with masterful strokes, a sweet intensity that sent shudders down his back. Eyes closed, he rested for a moment before discretely cleaning up and rising to leave the room.

He turned at the door. "Give him any medical attention that's required," he said to Daryl.

"Yes," Daryl said, bowing.

Iason paused for a moment, looking at Riki, who was still standing, now with his head bowed again. He turned on his heels and walked over to the mongrel, taking hold of his chin to turn his face up toward him. "I think you've learned something about what it means to be a pet. I never want to have to do that again. So, Riki. Do you think you can be more obedient now?"

"Yes," Riki whispered.

"Good." Iason leaned down and kissed Riki's throat, then whispered in his ear, "You belong to me, Iason Mink. You will always be my pet." At that moment he had a strong desire to take hold of his mongrel pet and kiss him thoroughly, deeply, but with Daryl standing there he resisted the urge.

Then Iason turned and left, puzzling over the intensity of his feelings for Riki, wondering where such desires would take him, would take them both. Maybe Raoul was right--maybe Riki would be his downfall. But...Iason knew, even if that were true, he would

never give up Riki, the dark-haired mongrel who each day became more dear to him, and who Iason felt had already captured his heart.

Unspoken Magnetism

Iason found his pace quickening as he neared his condominium, and his heart began pounding a little faster. Now that he had begun taking Riki, he found that, rather than taming his lust, his intimacy with the beautiful dark-haired mongrel only fueled his desire even more. His sexual exploits with his pet were quickly becoming the thing he looked forward to most each day; he spent more time in bed now than he had when he was younger and he and Raoul had secretly pleased each other in forbidden ways, something which they did not discuss now, but which remained a sexual undercurrent between them. He smiled when he thought of Raoul's jealousy when it came to Riki; Raoul was becoming increasingly agitated about Iason's mongrel pet. He wondered how Raoul would react if he knew exactly how much Riki pleased him.

As soon as he entered the dwelling, Daryl greeted him, bowing nervously. "Go sit until I call you, Daryl. We're not to be disturbed."

"Yes, Iason-sama," Daryl replied, his head bowed, retreating to his private room.

Riki did not even look up as Iason approached. Naked but for his chains, he had become accustomed to the scrutiny of his Blondie master, and, because he had recently been disciplined in a manner he did not care to repeat, now submitted to all Iason's demands without resistance, including sexual intimacy. He had learned from Daryl that pairing with a pet was atypical for Blondies, perhaps even forbidden. Though he didn't understand why Iason would choose to bed his own pet, there was something else that troubled him more. Riki found that, in spite of himself, he enjoyed being

with Iason, a fact that confused and shamed him, and now, in the presence of his beautiful blonde master, aroused him. He tried to hide his quickly developing erection, feeling his face grow hot.

Iason noticed his pet's physical response to his approach and smiled, feeling his own surge of carnal agitation. He walked over to the bed and sat down. "It's customary to greet your master, Riki."

The perplexed look on Riki's face amused him, and he laughed.

"What do you want me to say" Riki demanded.

"It's of no importance. Come here."

Riki rose slowly and approached Iason, avoiding eye contact, and hanging his head, his chains dragging along the floor.

"There's no reason to be ashamed of your arousal," Iason whispered. "Sit here, next to me."

Riki obeyed, and sitting so close to Iason fueled his lust even more.

"Look at me, Riki."

He swallowed, then met Iason's eyes, blue eyes that seemed to pierce into his very soul. There was no denying his master's own desires and intentions. And he found that, he wanted it, whatever Iason had in mind, he welcomed it.

Iason leaned down and kissed his pet, a long, sweet, lingering kiss, his tongue tracing gentle circles in Riki's mouth, then exploring deeper. He relished in Riki's response as his beloved pet returned the kiss. He began stroking Riki's now fully erect organ, delighting in the twitches and moans of his pet. Leaving a trail of gentle kisses along his neck, he whispered in Riki's ear, "Lie back on the bed."

Iason removed his clothing and then crawled toward Riki, whose eyes were shining with passion, his mouth slightly open. Iason now kissed him harder, running his hands up and down the mongrel's taut torso. He firmly took Riki's hands and placed them on his own body, and his pet began stroking him in return, at first out of obedience but then with escalating passion. The mongrel was now so aroused his erection was throbbing against his master's

body. Iason began stroking his pet again, eliciting small gasps of pleasure from him.

“Iason,” Riki whispered.

“Yes, my pet?”

Riki was silent, though his body began moving against Iason's hand, involuntarily thrusting.

Iason smiled. “Is there something you want, my Riki?” he said softly, and then, when Riki didn't reply, he leaned closer and whispered in his ear, “I want to hear you say it.”

“I want you to do...like how you did before.”

“And then? How shall I take you?”

“Whatever you decide, Iason.”

Such the obedient little pet, Iason observed. Riki's punishment had been hard on both of them, but there was no denying that ever since the day he was disciplined, there on that very bed, he had become remarkably obedient to Iason's will.

He knew, even before he took his pet into his mouth, that Riki would not last long. His urgency was so great that he began unconsciously thrusting inside Iason's mouth, which sent a thrill through the beautiful Blondie.

“Iason,” Riki moaned, and then he cried out, but his cry was choked off by the contraction of his muscles as he climaxed, a sound that was distinctively Riki. Iason drank of his pet and then moved up to lie next to him, enjoying the look of absolute bliss still lingering on his face. He bent down to impart a soft kiss, his blonde hair tickling Riki's face and causing his eyes to flutter and open.

“Now, my pet,” he whispered, “I want you to do the same for me.”

Riki's eyes widened slightly; this was the first time his master had made this request, and he had been privately wondering why Iason hadn't insisted on it earlier. He made as if to move but was stopped by Iason, who gently touched a finger to his lips.

“Kiss me,” his master instructed, then lay back on the bed.

Riki moved on top Iason, kissing him slowly, the taste of himself giving him a small thrill. He marveled at the sexual

appetites of this Blondie, who seemed to have been bred for pleasure. Although Iason was remarkably quiet in bed, there was no mistaking his utter enjoyment of all things sexual. His kiss now became more intense as he explored his master with his tongue, the magic of the pet ring now exciting a response from his own member.

Iason gently rested his hands on his shoulders, signaling his desire with a firm push. Riki obeyed, kissing Iason's chest and then sucking on each of his nipples, and then slowly moving further down, leaving a trail of kisses in his wake along the Blondie's beautiful abdomen. His own heart was now pounding as he anticipated this more intimate encounter with his master, this Blondie who physically was the most beautiful man he had ever seen. Iason was fully erect, his size astonishing to the dark-haired mongrel from the slums. No wonder Iason's initial entry caused him so much pain. He slid his hand around the shaft, then touched his tongue tentatively to the head, almost afraid to taste him.

Iason rested a hand on Riki's head, playing with his hair as his pet began to explore him. The wet warmth of the mongrel's mouth was deliciously stimulating, sending shivers of pleasure up his back. There was no mistaking that his pet had some experience in the art of pleasuring, and though he did not care to dwell on the details of that, Iason was appreciative of Riki's abilities. Certainly, he would not have minded--perhaps would even have relished-teaching his pet how to pleasure him, but at the moment he was rather grateful for the mongrel's considerable skill.

He rose up onto his elbows to watch Riki, and was tempted to allow him to continue to orgasm. But he had other things in mind, and he reached for the vial sitting on the bedside table.

Riki immediately noticed his master's movement, and involuntarily began trembling.

"Now, pet, come up here and lie next to me."

Riki obeyed, and Iason saw by the look on his face he was troubled about something.

"What is it, Riki?"

"Did you not...didn't you enjoy that?" Riki asked.

Iason laughed. "Are you only worried about that?" then, leaning closer, he whispered, "Yes, you were very good."

"Then why--" Riki began, eyeing the vial.

"It is just my preference to be inside you," he answered, and took hold of Riki's hand, poured from the vial into it, and then directed him to his throbbing organ. Riki lubricated his master, while Iason covered his own finger with the pleasure oil and slowly inserted it into his pet's tight portal. Riki was now visibly shaking.

"What, are you afraid?"

"No," Riki shot back, his eyes flashing in the characteristic way of the mongrel that Iason hadn't seen for awhile.

He smiled, then kissed his pet's forehead. "Then, lie facedown on the bed."

Riki froze for a moment. The last time he had heard those words...but he shook off the memory and rolled onto his stomach.

The mongrel's beautiful backside still showed fading remnants of his whipping, and Iason found that, for some inexplicable reason, this elicited a surge of carnal excitement. He continued stimulating his pet with his finger, sliding it in and out and wiggling it in an attempt to prepare him for his entry. Riki was remarkably tight, a fact which was of great pleasure to Iason but which made penetration, at least initially, a source of considerable pain for his pet. Pleasuring Riki first helped him relax, but it was not enough to preclude discomfort on entry.

Iason now moved, preparing to mount his mongrel pet. But suddenly Riki, panicking, turned and attempted to escape. Surprised, even amused, Iason easily restrained his pet by flipping him back on his stomach and lying on top of him.

"Do I need to discipline you again?" he whispered teasingly into his ear. "Shall I get the whip?"

"No," Riki choked back, his voice wavering. "Iason, help me."

Iason chuckled softly at his pet's bizarre request. "Help you...protect you from me?"

Riki was silent, realizing the foolishness of his words.

"I'll be gentle, my pet."

“No,” the mongrel said, weakly.

“Riki,” he said sternly. “Obey me. Or I will get the whip.”

His pet immediately wiggled into position, spreading his legs to invite entry, and Iason couldn't suppress a smile. He had no intention of disciplining Riki again--unless his pet truly deserved it--but he was discovering that his threat to do so was quite effective in eliciting obedience.

He pushed the mongrel's legs further apart, spreading him to reveal his inviting portal. Then, very slowly and gently, he began entering, pausing when Riki's cry informed him of his pet's discomfort. He waited for the muscles to relax before he pushed in a little further; only the tip was in, and he now had an extraordinary urge to plunge deeply, but he knew this would be too much for his pet. Advancing slowly in this manner, he was able to keep Riki's pain at a tolerable level, until finally he was fully inside him. For a few moments he just remained thus, lying there, allowing his pet to adjust to him. A sigh that escaped Riki's lips told him that he had moved from pain to pleasure.

“How does it feel now?” he whispered into Riki's ear. “You like this, don't you?”

“Yes,” Riki admitted.

“And this?” Iason began slowly thrusting inside him, while taking his pet's earlobe gently between his teeth.

Riki's reply was a series of gasps.

Iason began kissing the side of Riki's throat, the place he knew stimulated his pet most. He was delighting in the tightness of his pet and became more free with his movements, sliding his hands under Riki's hips and pulling him up to meet his thrusts more deeply. Riki initiated some slight backward thrusts of his own, propelling Iason to a new level of lust. He became aware of the fact that Riki was stimulating himself. Then he was taking his pet with abandon, plunging into him fully, almost violently. Riki tensed up beneath him as he reached orgasm with his characteristic gasps, his muscles contracting his already tight embrace, sending Iason into his final stretch. Then, he was there, the moment of agonizing

pleasure, his complete release into the body of his prostate pet, whose reception had gone so sweetly from resistance to provocation to complicit participation.

For some time he lay on his pet, who bore the full weight of his master's body without complaint. Then, rolling off to one side, he looked down at Riki, whose eyes remained closed. He had experienced few sexual encounters anything close to what he had just shared with his mongrel pet, a fact that admittedly disturbed him a little. What was it about this black-haired mongrel from the slums that so appealed to him? With a finger, he traced a trail from Riki's jaw down his throat.

Riki's eyes fluttered open, suddenly filled with dark rebellion.

"So are we done then?" he asked unceremoniously.

Iason smiled. "What? Are you trying to say that gave you no pleasure? I think we both know otherwise."

"When are you going to take these chains off already?" he demanded.

"When I'm ready."

Riki sulked at this and Iason laughed softly. "Do you really think I'd let you go free after you disobeyed me just now?"

"But I--" Riki began, then faltered.

"Be a good pet, Riki, and you'll find I'll treat you very well. You belong to Iason Mink. My pet will have nothing but the best and will be treated like no other pet. Once you are ready, I'll make that fact known to the world."

Master and pet then gazed at one another silently, each guessing at the thoughts of the other, each puzzling over the intensity of this unlikely relationship that seemed to compel them toward each other, this unspoken magnetism that drew one to the other, each day more closely together than the previous one. They both wondered where it would take them next.

Iason's Dreams

Night was falling, and the rising twin moons shone down on Tanagura. From the shadows, Iason watched his dark-haired pet enjoying his newfound freedom. Riki was perched on the ledge of the balcony, gazing down at the lights of the city below. Finally, the rebellious mongrel had been subdued enough to be freed of his chains, although Iason wondered how long it would be before he needed disciplining again. Since Riki had become his pet, Iason had come to enjoy his private life more than usual, and taming the spirited mongrel had been a fascinating project--one that, admittedly, he had taken too great a personal interest in. And now, just looking at his pet excited a passion in Iason that he felt unable to suppress--not that he wanted to suppress it.

He walked toward Riki, his footsteps drawing his pet's attention. The faraway look in the mongrel's eyes surprised Iason; the gleam of defiance had been replaced by a sad gaze of defeat. Though Riki's submission was, after all, what he desired, Iason found that he hoped for more affection from his pet. After all the sexual intimacy they had shared, he was wounded by the look, though he would never let Riki know.

He mustered up a slight laugh. "So, is it so terrible to be my pet, Riki? Did you want to jump off that ledge when you saw me coming?"

"Pets...are nothing but...trash," Riki said, the familiar angry gleam returning to his dark eyes.

“So. Are you saying that you've enjoyed none of our time together?” Iason traced a line down his pet's bare arm, smiling to hide his disappointment.

Riki looked away and said nothing.

Iason held his chin, turning his head to force his attention. “Whether you like it or not is of no importance,” he said sternly. “You are my pet. And you will behave as such.”

Riki pulled away angrily. “You're a stinking bastard! All you Blondies are nothing but perverts!”

Iason paused a moment before replying. “I see. It seems you weren't ready to be released from your chains after all. So, I'll have Daryl retrieve them.”

“No!” Riki cried, his eyes widening. “Iason, please...I...I'll...I'll...”

Iason leaned closer and whispered, “you'll what?”

“I'll do...whatever you say. Please, don't put those on me again. Please, Iason.”

“Then, come with me, Riki.”

Iason led him into the apartment and then his bedroom. He pulled Riki to him and kissed him--a long, slow kiss that finally elicited a response from his reluctant pet. “Take off your clothes and lie on the bed.” Just saying the words made Iason's heart pound a little faster. The beautiful body of the little mongrel triggered an immediate sexual response that was so intense he almost uttered a moan, but managed to suppress it.

“Spread your legs,” he said. “Yes. Just like that.” With a sharp intake of breath, Iason began undressing as he watched his pet stroke himself, pleased that he did not need to tell him to begin. Riki began to breathe deeper, his arousal apparent in his more frequent gasps. He lay on the bed next to Riki, and began slowly stroking his body and kissing his throat. The agonized gasps of his pet sent a thrill through him, and he teased him relentlessly with his tongue.

“Iason,” Riki finally whispered.

“Yes?”

Riki was silent for a moment, his body beginning to tremble.

“Go on. Say it.”

“Please...will you...do it to me?”

His triumph fueling his own desire further, Iason obliged, tracing a path with his tongue down the taut body, until he came to Riki's engorged shaft, which throbbed under his gentle touch. Already wet from Riki's lust, Iason swirled his tongue around the head, eliciting gasps of pleasure from his beloved pet. When he finally took him into his mouth, Riki's breathing grew more urgent, entangled with tiny cries and moans that made Iason acutely aware of his own growing need. When Riki began unconsciously playing with the silky blonde strands of his master's hair, Iason added tongue movement to his masterful technique, suddenly anxious for his pet's copulation. Then, in the moment of sweet release, Riki's cries filled the darkened room, driving Iason's own lust to another level.

Allowing his pet a few moments to recover, he pressed his fingers against Riki's mouth, demanding entry. Opening without resistance, Iason wet his fingers in his mouth, and then began preparing him for entry. His finger slid in easily, for Riki was now well broken in. One finger, and then two, and now Iason felt a surge deep within that demanded immediate consummation.

Perhaps a little roughly, he flipped Riki over, pulling his hips back to position him where he could penetrate deeply. He felt his own breathing increase, and he closed his eyes to regain some control. When he opened his eyes, his body had instinctively moved and his organ was pressed against the enticing portal. Resisting an almost overwhelming desire to thrust deeply into his exposed and vulnerable pet, Iason entered gently, allowing Riki time to adjust to him before he began his more violent conquest.

But once he began, Iason found that his need was more intense than usual. Maybe because of Riki's words or his attitude earlier in the evening, he now began thrusting with a ferocity that betrayed his own pent-up anger and frustration with Riki, this mongrel pet that refused to love his master. Riki's cries now were anguished,

and Iason discovered that this gave him a kind of satisfaction, encouraging him to plunge deeper and without mercy. Perhaps he had been too gentle with the mongrel. Perhaps he needed to learn how Iason Mink could be, if provoked.

"Iason," Riki pleaded.

"You don't care for this? Perhaps now you miss your usual gentle master?" he said through clenched teeth. Riki's reply was another tormented cry, and he turned to look back at Iason, his eyes wide with fear and pain.

Iason pulled back on Riki's hips, adjusting his position to penetrate deeper, harder, relishing the stimulation of his pet's tight embrace, all the more arousing when punctuated with Riki's cries.

"Whose pet are you?" he demanded, almost hissed. "Whose, Riki?"

Through broken sobs, the words finally came. "Yours, Iason."

The release that came with these words sent a shudder through Iason's body, and though he didn't cry out, he threw his head back, feeling the pleasure shoot deep within, pulling him into that inner space where all things, for that moment, merged together in blissful transcendence, where he and Riki were inextricably joined together in a love embrace.

The weeping of his pet brought him out of his altered state, and as he drifted back into the reality of Riki's true feelings, he felt overwhelmed with a sense of sorrow and longing. Gathering him into his arms, Iason comforted his pet, now feeling some regret for treating him so harshly.

"Why?" Riki finally said, his voice a barely audible whisper.

"To teach you. I can discipline you with more than just chains."

"But...what...are you teaching me?"

"To be my pet."

Riki shook his head, trembling. "I don't understand."

"Yield to me, Riki. I want you completely," Iason whispered, pulling his pet to him.

Riki, exhausted and defeated, laid his head on Iason's chest, and closed his eyes. Iason smiled, pleased with his pet's submission.

He held Riki close, gently rocking him long after the enslaved youth had fallen into a profound slumber, long after his own thoughts had drifted from contentment to sorrow to longing, and long after the twin moons had risen high into the night sky.

“My Riki,” he whispered in the sleeping pet's ear. “Love me, Riki.”

Nuzzling up against his pet, Iason finally closed his eyes and waited for the comforting oblivion of his dreams.

Transgressions

Riki paced restlessly, cursing, then in frustration kicked over a small table, sending a vase crashing to the floor.

“Sir Riki, please,” begged Daryl, rushing to clean up the broken fragments. “When the Master comes, he will not be pleased if you are like this.”

“Oh? I don't give a fuck what 'the Master' thinks. I'm sick and tired of being caged in here like some animal to do that pervert's bidding. My life is over. I might as well have died...” his voice trailed off as he remembered how he first encountered the formidable Blondie who now controlled every aspect of his life.

“But, he has removed your chains. If you continue like this, he will put them back on you. Or worse. Please, I don't want to have to...be the one to--” Daryl stopped, looking around nervously as though afraid Iason was listening.

“You don't want to be the one to discipline me again, is that it? I'm sick of his threats about that, too. Fuck it.” Riki strode over to the desk where Iason kept some of his personal things, searching for the concealed drawer where the Blondie stored the kasey-whip. “Where is it?”

“Sir Riki, please, stop. Only the Master is allowed there.” Daryl was beside himself with anxiety, turning repeatedly to look at the door.

“Relax, why don't ya? He's not going to do anything to you. You're such the perfect little...hah! Here we go!” The drawer slid open with snap. “And...look what we have here.” Riki pulled out the

kasey-whip, striking the desk with it for effect. "His little implement of torture. Bet the pervert loved watching me suffer."

"Sir Riki, I am begging you," Daryl pleaded. "I implore you, put it back."

Riki laughed and walked across the room to the door that led to the balcony, waited for the door to open, then stepped outside. With a mischievous smile at Daryl, he flung the whip over the ledge. "And that's the end of that."

Daryl shook his head. "You know that won't be the end of it. I don't understand why you...why you do things like this. Deliberately provoking him."

"Because I hate the bastard!" Riki shouted.

"Please, your voice," Daryl whispered. "Someone will hear."

"I don't give a fuck who hears!" Riki screamed.

At that moment the door opened, and Iason and Raoul entered. Daryl greeted Iason, who ignored him, noting the turned over table and broken glass. Then he looked at Riki. "What's this screaming?" he asked quietly.

"Let me go," Riki demanded. "I've more than repaid you. Or give me to the freak there next to you, anyone but you."

"Riki," Iason said sharply, and Riki fell to his knees from the sudden punishing restriction of the ring. "How dare you speak to me that way, and insult Raoul."

"You can...both...go to...hell, for all I care," Riki gasped.

"Perhaps another time would be better for our...talk," Raoul said. "We'll discuss that matter tomorrow."

Iason was so furious, he could only nod at Raoul, who left quietly, but not without a slight smile at Riki, who he knew was in for punishment.

"Are you deliberately trying to ruin my reputation? That was Raoul, a respected Blondie and a good friend, who I brought here, hoping to show you off a bit. I thought we'd made remarkable progress. But it appears I was sadly mistaken."

"You're both...fucking...perverts."

At this, Iason emitted a long sigh, pausing a few moments before speaking. "It seems we need to relearn some basic lessons in obedience. How unfortunate. I'd hoped we were finished with discipline." He turned and walked to the desk, then froze, seeing the open drawer.

Riki choked out a laugh in between his gasps.

Iason stood, with his hand on his hip. "Daryl. Why is this drawer open?"

"Sir Riki, he....," Daryl hesitated, glancing over at Riki.

"Riki. Where is the kasey-whip?"

Iason loosened the ring so his pet could answer, and Riki climbed back to his feet, shaking his head back cockily.

"It's not there," Riki said with a smug smile. "I suggest you look somewhere down in the city below, I'm not exactly sure where it landed when I threw it."

Iason laughed softly. "I see. You're the very model of defiance. You're ready to take me on, is that it? You...won't be smiling when I'm finished with you," he said quietly, then "Daryl."

"Yes, Iason-sama," Daryl said, rushing towards the Blondie.

"Go to the pavilion on the second level and purchase a new kasey-whip. A C-17 class. No--C-18. Tell them to have a T-stand sent here immediately, with quarter cuffs."

Daryl nodded, giving Riki a frightened look, one which made Riki's stomach churn a little.

"Yes," Iason said lowly, his anger now evident in his voice. "You should be afraid. I'm going to punish you myself tonight." He walked toward the wayward mongrel, who took an instinctive step back as the glowering Blondie approached. "I'm going to teach you, once and for all, that you're my pet, and that you will conform to my will." He grabbed Riki by the hair, pulling his head back. At the same time, his pet ring constricted and emitted additional pain-inducing G-waves, causing him to cry out in agony.

"You feel that, do you?"

Riki's reply was an anguished sob.

Leaning closer to his pet, Iason whispered in his ear, “still feeling defiant?”

“Please,” Riki gasped, “let me go.”

“I have told you. You will always be my pet,” he answered, then, more quietly, “I must admit, I’m a little surprised that you’re rebelling now. You weren’t unhappy last night, I think? Have you already forgotten? That’s what made me so confident in bringing Raoul here. I wanted to show you off. But you...chose instead to behave like an untamed mongrel.”

“Because I’m fucking going out of my mind!” Riki cried, then screamed from the punishing constriction of the pet ring. Iason released his grip on his hair, and Riki fell to his knees again, doubling over with pain.

Iason gave a slight laugh. “So. You thought you’d intentionally provoke me, is that it? You prefer discipline to boredom? Or did you think...you’d somehow escape punishment?”

“Bastard,” Riki gasped, now completely on the floor, his knees pulled to his chest as he suffered from the torment of the ring. He remained thus until Daryl returned from his errand, carrying a new kasey-whip, at which time the ring suddenly loosened, much to Riki’s relief.

“Daryl. Bring it here.”

Daryl rushed to his master, who took the new whip and tapped it against his left hand a few times. Riki eyed it with some consternation.

“Oh yes, perhaps I should warn you. It’s a C-18 class, a bit thicker, which means you’re going to feel it a lot more. It’s got a special retracting buffer mechanism, though, so it shouldn’t break the skin, though you’ll be pretty sore for a few days. It’s designed especially for Blondies who want to administer the discipline themselves but don’t want to leave scars on their pets. It seems,” he said with a little laugh, “we don’t know our own strength.” He turned. “Daryl. Go wait until I call you. See that we’re not disturbed.”

“Yes, Sir,” he answered, giving Riki a look filled with pity.

Riki, still on his knees, found that he was trembling.

"Pet," Iason commanded sharply. "Take off your clothes and lie facedown on the bed."

"Iason," he began, desperate now to avoid punishment at the hands of his furious Blondie master with this new device. "I won't...do it again...I won't...please."

"Not open for negotiation! On the bed, pet!"

With trembling fingers, Riki undressed, unable to look at Iason, who now filled him with terror. He had never seen him so angry, and now he was beginning to seriously regret his rashness.

"Please," he tried again. "I'll do whatever you say. I'll--"

"Yes, you will do what I say. And the first thing you'll do is get on that bed." Iason's command was punctuated with the excruciating punishment of the pet ring, which was answered by Riki's tormented cry.

"Don't make me tell you again," Iason whispered.

Shaking, Riki got up and climbed onto the bed, lying down with a little sob of defeat.

"Did you really think you'd get off without being punished? That you could talk your way out of it after that performance in front of Raoul? Look at me."

Riki met his master's eyes with great reluctance, now utterly terrified. The Blondie seemed even larger than he remembered, and the look of pure fury on his face was unlike anything he had ever witnessed. Daryl warned him how terrifying Iason could be, but Riki had not really understood, until this moment. With both hands on his hips, and his legs spread apart, the kasey-whip beneath one gloved hand, the Blondie looked truly menacing, and now Riki desperately regretted provoking him.

"Did you think throwing that kasey-whip over the ledge would save you from punishment? Or maybe you were just trying to provoke me, isn't that it? I suppose that amused you--you were pretty proud of yourself, I think?"

"Please...Iason..."

“Pet. You're going to be punished now. And I'm not going to stop until I've driven total submission into you.”

Iason slapped the kasey-whip suggestively against his gloved hand a few times and the dark-haired mongrel began trembling uncontrollably.

Iason noted his pet's trembling with some satisfaction. Riki was already afraid, and the discipline hadn't even begun. In truth, Iason was shaking himself. He had never felt so furious with him as he did in this moment. It was not just the embarrassing display in front of Raoul, who had counseled him countless times on the imprudence of a mongrel pet, or even Riki's blatant challenge to his authority--his remarkable audacity in disposing of the kasey-whip. More than this, it was his stinging comment...anyone but you.

“Pet,” he said sternly. “You are never to address a Blondie like Raoul in such a disrespectful manner again.” Iason struck his thighs with the kasey-whip, hard, eliciting a frightened, anguished cry from his pet.

“You will never openly defy me again!” Another strike, this one bringing tears to the mongrel's eyes.

“And you will never touch my whip again, is that understood?” he hissed. The third strike, falling on his pet's exposed buttocks, was so hard that Riki began pleading for him to stop.

“Oh no,” Iason laughed brokenly. “We've barely started.”

“Excuse me, Iason Sir,” Daryl said.

“I said we were not to be interrupted,” Iason said, without turning.

“Yes Sir. Excuse me. But they've arrived with the T-stand.”

“Ah. Yes. Have them bring it in here.”

Riki buried his face on the bed with shame, knowing that those who saw him in such a humiliating position would be quick to spread the gossip that Iason Mink was disciplining his mongrel pet. Not that he cared especially about the gossip, but his social life was already so difficult in Eos. The news of his whipping would come as a great source of amusement to Enif and many others.

“Did I say you could look away?” Iason said sharply.

Riki turned to look at the Blondie, who now stood, stroking the whip, and then proceeded to punish his pet in the presence of everyone there, much to Riki's complete mortification. Although he tried not to cry out, he could not help it, nor could he stop himself from eventually begging for mercy and an end to the brutal whipping.

Finally, Iason stopped. Riki sobbed like a child, now completely oblivious to the audience that had witnessed his punishment in a hushed awe. They had finished setting up the T-stand and now left, whispering among themselves. Eventually Riki's sobs abated and he became aware of the immense object that now stood against the wall.

"Wha...what is that?" he asked weakly.

"This will be your new home for the next day or so, until I decide you've had enough."

Riki eyed the device warily, noting the four cuffs with a sinking feeling. Did Iason really intend to chain him standing, arms and legs spread? Suddenly he felt overcome with nausea, and before he could stop himself he had spewed on the floor. "I'm sorry," he whispered. Surprisingly, Iason did not punish him for that infraction. He called Daryl, who rushed over to clean up the mess.

Iason watched Riki for a moment. His pet's sudden sickness surprised him. It was so unlike the mongrel to be that afraid, to tremble so uncontrollably. Perhaps...he was taking things too far. His anger had dissipated somewhat now. He noted the deep red raised whip marks on his pet's backside and had to concede that he had struck him quite hard and relentlessly, and with a C-18. Perhaps that was sufficient punishment. He returned the kasey-whip to the drawer, and then made a decision. He would save the T-stand for some other transgression.

"I think that's punishment enough. You can get up now, Riki."

Riki remained motionless.

"Did you hear me?"

"I...I can't move, Iason."

Iason smiled. "Yes, that might be a little difficult."

“I mean I really can't...move.”

Suddenly, Iason's heart began pounding. “Come now. I told you. Get up.”

His pet continued to lie on the bed. Iason walked over to him, studying his motionless body with concern. “Make a fist,” he said.

“I...can't.”

Iason was suddenly seized with a horrible thought, and quickly retrieved the kasey-whip from the drawer, turning it on its end to read the class number. “Daryl! I told you C-18, not C-20!”

“Yes, Iason, Sir, C-18 is what I asked for,” Daryl stuttered.

“This is a C-20!” Iason shouted.

“I'm...s-s-sorry.” Daryl bowed his head, trembling.

Iason buried his face in his hands for a moment, then buzzed Katze. “I have a medical emergency. Get me some assistance here, right away. I used a C-20 by mistake. Katze. Be sure to tell them C-20.”

“Holy shit,” Katze breathed. “All right. I'll take care of it.”

Iason turned to Daryl. “Who sold this to you?”

“Sir...Sir Yousi, it was, I believe.”

“That idiot! I'll kill him.” Iason turned and rushed over to Riki, who was now unable to talk.

“Excuse me...Iason-sama...what is wrong with Riki?”

“Leave us!” Iason said sharply.

“Yes, Sir,” he replied weakly, backing away.

“Riki,” Iason said softly, “I know you can still hear me. Don't be afraid, my pet.” He pushed the hair out of Riki's eyes, bending down to kiss his forehead. “Help is coming.”

Riki's eyes were now completely dilated. Iason took hold of his pet's hand and brought it to his lips, just holding it there. “This wasn't my intent. Do you understand me?”

It was not long before the medical team arrived and rushed to attend the motionless pet.

“Did he vomit?” one man asked.

“Yes,” Iason said, anxiously.

“Actually that's good. That might have saved him. It's pretty late to be administering the antidote.”

“What...what is wrong with him?” Daryl asked again, risking Jason's displeasure in his desperation to know what had happened to Riki.

One of the medics turned to him. “The C-20 'Spider' emits a poison. It's meant to be used for terminal punishment. Each strike releases a little more, eventually paralyzing the pet and stopping its heart. We're administering the antidote now.”

Jason stood with his back to the wall, his expressionless face hiding a torrent of emotions. He felt numb. When he thought of how hard he had struck his pet with the kasey-whip, each strike delivering more of the poison into his system, he felt overcome with remorse. All he had intended was to discipline Riki--rather harshly, to be sure--but certainly not to seriously harm...or...kill him. But his rage had unbalanced him. He hadn't even checked the class number, a careless, foolish mistake. If he were to kill his beloved pet....

“He's coming around.”

Jason rushed to Riki's side, and when he saw his pet open his mouth slightly, he felt overwhelmed with relief.

“Lucky break. Looks like he'll be okay now. The antidote just needs to get through his system.”

“Give him pain relief,” Jason said. “And leave enough to last for a few days.”

Jason hardly noticed when the medical team left. He sat next to Riki for hours, attending him, and tormenting himself with how close he came to losing his pet. And now, even with pain relief, he could see Riki still suffered from the brutal beating, and that he had been far too hard on the tiny mongrel. He knew he would never be able to punish his pet with a whip again. His rage over Riki's words had come so suddenly, he hadn't really thought about what he was doing. Rage--and, more than anything, hurt, over his pet's rejection. He knew it was foolish to be so concerned with how his pet felt toward him. But he couldn't help himself. Jupiter be damned...he loved the black-haired mongrel.

“Iason,” Riki finally whispered. “You don't have to stay with me all night. I don't blame you...I know...I deserved it.”

“Hush.” Iason put a finger to his pet's lips, then followed that up with a gentle kiss. “Go to sleep, my pet,” he whispered, stroking his dark hair. Riki drifted off, comforted by Iason's touch. Iason stayed by him for a long time, reflecting on their mutual transgressions.

The Winds of Tanagura

Once again Riki was sitting on the balcony when Iason arrived; this had become a favorite spot for his pet, who always seemed to be looking off in the distance, toward the slums where the Blondie had first encountered him. The slight movement of his head told Iason he was aware of his approach.

“Don't tell me you've been out here this whole time.”

“There's nothing else to do in this shithole,” he answered, tossing a finished smoke over the ledge.

Iason put his arms around his pet from behind, reaching down between his legs to awaken his manhood with a suggestive caress. “Nothing?” he asked softly.

“You...are a fucking bastard,” Riki gasped.

“Is that so?” Iason smiled, bending down to kiss him on the neck. He had now grown more accustomed to Riki's mongrel-like insults and remarks, and mostly tolerated the verbal abuse from his pet without reprisal. Now that he and Riki had become intimate, Iason knew another side to his pet, one that spoke more inviting words to his master, the language of desire and pleasure, telling him what the proud mongrel from the slums could never say. The Blondie had made a discovery of sorts: Riki used harsh language to shield his true feelings.

Iason concentrated on the place along the side of Riki's neck that he knew the mongrel couldn't resist; within seconds, the gasps of his pet informed him he hadn't missed his mark. Moving up to his ear, the Blondie whispered “tell me what you want, my pet.”

“I want...I want,” Riki breathed. “Oh....”

The Blondie nibbled on his pet's earlobe, then flicked a tongue into his ear.

"Ah!" Riki cried out. He let his head fall back against Iason, surrendering to the enticing sensations offered by his Blondie master. "I want your mouth."

Iason leaned close to his face, smiling. "Do you mean you want a kiss?"

"Y-yes." Riki blushed, ashamed that he wanted him so much. He wanted his mouth other places, too, but yet couldn't bring himself to ask. It had been this way from the very beginning, the disconcertingly provocative sexuality of Iason Mink that aroused him in ways no one else had, or probably ever could.

Iason tilted his head back, and began gently exploring his mouth in languid paths, relishing his pet's responsiveness. He reached down again and found that Riki was now fully aroused, his erection twitching in his hand. It was always this way with the black-haired mongrel--easily stimulated, and easily satisfied. Iason knew he could reach completion within minutes without the restriction of the pet ring, but he wanted it to last longer, so he teased his pet with a few sensual strokes and then released him.

"Come, Riki," he said, walking back towards the apartment. Riki followed him inside, unable to stop his heart from pounding, or keep his eyes from taking in the graceful form of the Blondie who walked before him, his long blonde hair twisting softly in the breeze as he moved. He found he longed to run his hands through that hair, to bury his face in it, and then felt angry with himself for wishing it. Once in the bedroom, Iason turned and looked at him, and seemed to guess his thoughts, as always, for the knowing smile appeared, taunting him.

"Your eyes betray you," he whispered. "You're quite ready for me, isn't that so?"

"Hmph," Riki snorted, tossing his head to the side. "You...must live in a fantasyland of perversion, if you think I enjoy this."

Jason laughed softly. "So, now you play the coy virgin, being forced to engage in undesirable acts? Weren't you the one who offered your body up for sex first, in true mongrel form?"

"Only to repay you, not because I wanted it...or...enjoyed it." Riki swallowed, remembering vividly how much he had enjoyed it, much to his own mortification.

"Is that so? Then your body thought otherwise, if I recall...or am I mistaken that you released your lust almost the moment I touched you?" Now Jason pushed him against the wall, pinning his arms above his head with one hand. "Now do you remember?" he whispered.

Riki closed his eyes, reliving the embarrassment of ejaculating from the mere touch of the Blondie. He had been naked, standing against the wall while Jason, fully dressed, had pinned his hands above his head with his own gloved hand, in this same way. His intense scrutiny had been enough to arouse him completely, and when Jason finally ran a hand down his torso to his hip, and pushed aside his knee with his own, he had been unable to contain himself.

Jason leaned over and began kissing his neck, tormenting him with his tongue and gentle nibbles. He was determined to make his pet ask for what he wanted. Riki moaned, desperate to take matters to a more intimate level, but too stubborn to ask. He gasped as his Blondie master slid up against him in an erotic motion designed to inform him of his readiness. Finally he could bear it no more.

"Jason...please..."

"Please what?" Jason said softly. Now he pressed up against him more firmly, capturing his mouth in a delicately provocative kiss. "Tell me, Riki," he said, breaking away. "Ask me."

"Please...what I really want...is for you to stop."

For a moment, the Blondie did stop, stabbed with an unexpected infusion of hurt and anger. The look in Riki's eyes was now full of dark hatred, all traces of his former lust gone. Releasing his hands and lifting the mongrel up in one easy motion, he tossed his pet on the bed roughly, then stood with his hands on his hips.

"Get undressed," he said, darkly, unable to hide his irritation.

“Fuck you!”

“Then...,” Jason put his hands on the bed and leaned close to him, “I’ll just have to rip them off you.”

Which he proceeded to do, with Riki struggling against him the entire time, pounding at him with his fists furiously.

“Get your filthy hands off me!” he screamed. “I’m not your plaything!”

Jason laughed at his attempts to thwart his design, pinning his wrists easily to the mattress and lying on the mongrel until, finally, he ceased struggling.

“Ready to cooperate?”

Riki made no answer, turning his head away.

Jason released him and got up. He took off his gloves, his eyes taking in the beautiful body of the dark-haired, dark-eyed mongrel sprawled on the bed. His pet’s arousal was incontrovertible, and yet he refused to welcome Jason’s advances, much to his complete mystification. And earlier, had his pet not asked him for a kiss? He couldn’t untangle Riki’s reasoning process, or understand why tonight he was suddenly was so elusively rebellious.

But...as for his own needs, they were mounting rapidly. He required release, and his desire had only increased from his struggles with Riki. He unfastened his trouser flap for easy access, and revealed his arousal to his watching pet.

“Sit on the edge of the bed,” he ordered.

Riki ignored this request, turning his head away.

Jason reached over and grabbed him by the hair, pulling him to the edge of the bed and positioning him there, then pulling his head back.

“Obey me, pet, or I’ll chain you up and whip you,” he threatened, the harsh tone of his voice making the validity of his threat certain.

Riki inhaled in a way that betrayed his anxiety on this point, yet persisted in his resistance.

“Look at me.”

His pet's eyes met his, still shining with defiance, but the hatred Iason had noted earlier was gone, now replaced by fear. This odd shifting combination of defiance and fear--he now looked more like the proud mongrel he had first encountered in the slums.

"Pleasure me, pet," he whispered, guiding Riki's head toward his throbbing organ.

But Riki kept his mouth pressed closed, trying to turn his head away.

Frustrated, Iason pulled his head back and struck his pet across the face, hard. "Obey me!"

Riki gasped in surprise, a little stunned, his cheek burning furiously. He blinked at Iason, who raised his hand to strike him again, then moved forward to swirl his tongue around the tip of his master's engorged member, reaching up to grasp the shaft in his hand.

"Good boy," Iason breathed. "Yes. Just like that."

For some moments he relished his pet's submission and excruciatingly sweet technique, enjoying the warm wetness of the mongrel's mouth, and the gentle strokes of his hand. Then he took hold of Riki's head with both hands and began thrusting purposefully. His pet relaxed his throat and allowed his master to take him fully in the mouth, now unable to resist stroking himself and desperate for release, though too proud to admit it to his Blondie master.

Iason closed his eyes and threw his head back, delighting in the ecstasy of his pet's more willing reception. He had been planning to take Riki another way, but now he was strongly tempted to release in his mouth. His need was rising, his lust surging, and Riki's tongue began twitching against him in a deliberately erotic way as he moved. It was too much, too perfect, too delicious to resist. With unparalleled blissful intensity, he felt his sexuality burst beyond his control, releasing in rhythmic waves of pleasure while he floated behind, suspended in its heavenly wake. Though he had actually not made a sound, his mouth had opened, and for the first time Riki noticed his master trembling.

As he pulled out, their eyes met, master and pet, and some sort of understanding was written there that made any additional discussion of Riki's disobedience unnecessary.

Iason noted Riki's erection and furtively retreating hand with a smile. "Now pet," he said. "I am going to pleasure you."

Relieved that he didn't have to humiliate himself by asking for it, and now completely desperate for it, Riki immediately squirmed back on the bed, spreading his legs and waiting with a pounding heart for his master's skillful pleasuring arts. Iason smiled at his obvious readiness, moving on top of him, erotically teasing his mouth with his tongue, then advancing to his neck, and chest, and all the way down his abdomen. Riki was beside himself with lust, rocking his pelvis in tiny anxious thrusts. He wanted Iason desperately, loved his every move, his every touch, longed to release himself in his Blondie master's wet embrace, and this was driving him mad with guilt. When he thought of Guy, and how much more he desired his new Blondie master than his old pairing partner from the slums, he felt like scum. And yet--he raised his head as Iason took hold of him and began stimulating him beautifully with his tongue--he couldn't deny that he was immensely attracted to Iason. His exquisitely perfect, chiseled features, his formidably sensual intellect, and impossibly lovely long blonde hair, his confident, gentle touch, all these things taunted him. Unable to resist, he reached out and took hold of Iason's hair, letting its silkiness run through his fingers. Iason looked up at him with his pristine blue eyes as he took him in his mouth, a seductive gaze that sent his heart racing. He dropped his head back on the bed with a slight moan, covering his eyes with one arm, as though he were hiding from that which he knew was the truth, but couldn't bear to face. "Iason," he whispered.

Moments later, he cried out in utter ecstasy as his Blondie master took him across a threshold to a place he had never been before, a level of pleasure he hadn't known existed, that no one--not even Guy--had been able to show him before. "Fuck yes," he cried, then struggled to retain his composure as tears welled up in his eyes.

Then, he found himself sobbing, unable to stop himself. Then Iason was holding him, his gentle hands stroking his hair.

“What is it, pet?” he asked softly.

But Riki only buried his face in his master's chest with a defeated, anguished moan.

Iason wondered at Riki's sudden breakdown, trying to understand the mind of this strange mongrel, whose moods changed so easily from one moment to the next, seemingly shifting without reason or destination, like the winds that blew across Tanagura.

Rebellion and Forgiveness

Riki was strolling near the pavilion, enjoying his freedom, when a low, familiar voice stopped him.

“Z107M, isn't it? Iason's mongrel?”

He turned to confront the towering form of Raoul, the Blondie that had been with Iason the day Riki had so infuriated his Blondie master, resulting in a brutal punishment he would not soon forget.

Riki nodded slightly, wondering what he wanted, and noting the look of disdain on his face with no small amount of annoyance.

“I heard your punishment was quite a show. I wish I had been there to see it. Guess you're the lucky one. If it had been me, and you'd put on that disgraceful little display of disobedience, I would have made sure it was a C-20. Then I'd have dumped your body into Manatung Bay for the krostafish to feed on.”

Riki repressed a strong urge to impart his thoughts about how he'd handle Raoul's corpse, if given the opportunity, remembering all too well Iason's lesson about how to address Blondies. It was all he could do to keep from replying.

Raoul, smiling slightly at Riki's obvious perturbation, continued. “Tell me, Z107M, is it true Iason takes you?”

He glared at the sneering Blondie, certain that such questions were not usually directed at pets.

“So. I can see by your expression that it is. Not that it's any surprise--everyone in Eos suspects as much. Although personally I don't understand it--why would he even put his hands on a filthy mongrel like you? It's truly revolting.” Now he leaned down and said, in an icy tone, “But if you're the cause of Iason's downfall, I'll

personally take you as my pet, and punish you mercilessly every day until I choose to dispose of you.”

Now Riki was shaking with anger, every part of his Bison nature urging him to pound into this towering piece of Blondie scum. Only his fear of Iason's wrath--his recent discipline was too fresh in his mind to ignore--restrained him.

With a slight laugh of contempt, Raoul walked off without another word, leaving Riki to stare after him, clenching and unclenching his fists. The encounter had ruined the stroll for him, and he returned to the penthouse apartment on the top floor, feeling anxious and depressed. Surprisingly, Iason was there when he arrived, which was unusual for the afternoon.

“Ah. Riki. Come here, my pet.” Iason was sitting, legs crossed, near the window, a glass of wine in hand.

Riki walked over to him.

“Sit on my lap,” he said, uncrossing his legs. After Riki had settled comfortably in his master's lap, Iason took hold of his chin, looking him in the eyes. “So. What's wrong? You look as though you have something to say.”

He hesitated, unsure of what to do. Should he tell his Blondie master about his encounter with Raoul?

“I see. Perhaps I can help you. Does it have anything to do with Raoul?”

Riki's eyes widened and he wondered what sort of sorcery or technology had given him this information. He glanced down at his clothing, as though searching for a spyware device of some kind.

Iason laughed. “Your thoughts are sometimes so easy to see,” he said, then added in a soft whisper, “though not always.”

He gestured to the window with his wine glass. “I could see you down by the pavilion. I saw Raoul stop you. It seemed like he had quite a lot to say. I want you tell me what he said to you, my pet.”

Somewhat relieved, he related the encounter in its entirety. As he spoke, Iason's face remained expressionless. But because he knew his master so well, he could almost see the anger being

worked up behind his cool mask. He took a sip of wine, then laughed softly. "Raoul," he whispered.

"Get up now," he commanded, and as he did so, Iason smacked him with a playful spank, a habit his master had acquired that Riki found particularly annoying.

"I'm not...a child. I'm not yours to do with however you please!"

Iason set his glass down with a smile. "I challenge that assertion," he said, taking hold of his pet and placing him firmly over his knee, then spanking him, hard--though not excessively so--much to Riki's extreme irritation.

"You most definitely are mine to do with as I please." He spanked a little harder.

"Let me go! Dammit, Iason! You fucking asshole!"

Iason leaned closer to him. "That constitutes a direct challenge to my authority. Now it's time for some real punishment."

Then he proceeded with a spanking that hurt far more than Riki would admit. The Blondie really didn't know his own strength.

"Please. Iason," he said finally, cringing.

His master set him up on his feet with one hand. "Now you have been duly chastised. See that you obey me from now on, or further castigation may be required."

Riki leaned against the wall, hands in his pockets. "You're fucking hilarious."

Iason rose, donning his outer robe in a fluid, graceful movement. "I'm going out for awhile...to see Raoul," he added with a pointed look at his pet. "When I return," he took hold of his chin, "I plan to take you most deliciously."

"How is that different from any other day?"

Iason leaned forward. "Insolent pets are the first to be punished. I predict another spanking for a certain frequently naughty pet."

"Hmph," he snorted, though as the Blondie turned to leave, he smiled. He would give anything to know what Iason would say to Raoul, that piece of Blondie trash who Riki now utterly despised.

Iason found that he grew angrier the more he thought about Raoul's intrusion and his words to Riki. Clearly jealousy was behind it, but the fact that he had the audacity to ask his pet about his private life irked him especially. His roundabout threat to kill Riki and his promise to take him as his pet were equally infuriating. Raoul certainly knew he had no right even speaking with his pet, let alone badgering him for information and threatening him. He was proud of Riki for his silence and restraint, fully cognizant of how difficult that must have been for the proud leader of Bison.

When he reached Raoul's flat, for a moment Raoul looked surprised to see him, then--perceiving Iason's extreme displeasure--smiled.

"I see. So the little mongrel came running to you?"

"How dare you threaten him, Raoul. And...inquire into my private life."

"I'm only thinking of you," he answered, hotly. "Have you thought about what's going to happen to you if you carry on like this? Jupiter--"

"My private life...is none of your concern. Nor Jupiter's for that matter."

Raoul took a step closer, leaning toward him. "It wasn't always that way. But now you shut me out."

"That was long ago, Raoul," he sighed, exasperated.

"And you feel nothing now?" he shot back, angrily.

Iason lowered his eyes. "I feel something...but not for you."

Furious, Raoul took hold of Iason's shoulders, kissing him violently, desperately.

With a firm shove, Iason pushed him away.

"Don't tell me it's that mongrel you're talking about? Iason. Are you saying you'd rather have some filthy mongrel pet in your bed than me?"

"I am saying...that my relationship with Riki is of no concern to you and that, though I respect and admire you as a friend, Raoul, the time of our passion is long past."

He turned and moved toward the door, but before he could leave, Raoul came up behind him, wrapping his arms around him and pressing his body close.

"Iason. How about just one more time," he whispered in his ear. "Right now. Let me prove myself."

Iason hesitated, but only because he was pondering what to say. "If you want to know, then yes, it's true. I take Riki. Not just that... No one could ever come close to what we share. Not even you, Raoul."

He left Raoul with these stinging words and returned to the penthouse.

Riki, as usual, was on the balcony. "Riki. Come here," he commanded. As he approached, Iason reached out to give his pet a little spank and Riki, smiling mischievously, dodged him. Laughing, Iason grabbed him and lifted him up, carrying him over to the dining table, then set him down on it, pushing his thighs apart to squeeze in close to him.

He began kissing him, feeling unusually passionate and urgent. "Take off your clothes," he whispered. Riki complied.

"Daryl," Iason called.

"What!" Riki cried.

Iason chuckled softly. "Not what you're thinking, my pet."

"Yes Iason, Sir," Daryl said, avoiding direct eye contact with either of them.

"Bring me the vial on the bedside table."

Daryl rushed to retrieve the wanted vessel, retreating to his quarters when Iason forbade further disturbance.

Riki eyed the vial, then studied Iason. It was unusual for him to move so quickly. His master was clearly quite aroused. This made him wonder about the visit to Raoul. He had been toying with the notion for some time that Iason and Raoul had some sort of connection. He wondered what exactly his relationship with this Raoul was and found that he hoped Iason was not pairing with him. But his Blondie master had learned his considerable repertoire of

pleasuring skills somewhere, and if pets weren't usually taken by their masters, Iason must have been with someone.

"What is it, Riki?" Iason laughed. "You look quite put out. And I thought you'd come to enjoy this." He shook the vial suggestively.

"You and Raoul...are you...", he struggled, trying to think of the right word, "intimate?"

Iason leaned toward him. "Is my pet jealous?" he smiled.

Riki snorted. "Why would I be jealous of that piece of Blondie shit?"

Iason laughed softly. "We were paired at one time. But...that was a long time ago." He leaned down and gave his pet another urgent kiss, pulling him off the table to his feet. "Now, turn around."

As he did so, Iason pushed him firmly down onto the table. Riki was surprised when he felt Iason spreading him, then the hot wetness of his tongue snaking past his portal. He moaned, loudly, turning to see the beautiful Blondie sitting back gracefully on his heels, his blonde hair trailing on the floor. "Fucking Jupiter," he breathed, his eyes rolling back in ecstasy. Now he felt Iason's firm, warm hand encircling his shaft, stroking him masterfully, and the simultaneous stimulation of his tongue and his hand hurled him full speed toward his critical point; it was all excruciatingly lovely and wickedly pleasurable, unlike anything he had ever experienced. He moaned almost continuously, completely overwhelmed by the tides of impending rapture that washed over him in relentless waves. "Ahh...Iason," he moaned, then, clenching his teeth, he cried out his unfathomably sweet consummation.

As he drifted on swells of lingering pleasure, he felt the penetration of Iason's finger, then a second, then Iason himself pressed up against him. Then suddenly, with hands firmly holding his hips, his Blondie master plunged fully into him, bringing tears to his eyes as he cried out in agony.

"Forgive me, my pet," Iason whispered, his voice thick with urgency. "I'm going to be hard on you." And he proceeded to take

him violently and deeply, with raw, unfettered abandon, his need compelling a swift resolution.

Arching his back and throwing back his head, his long hair spiraling backward, Iason reached his pinnacle, and for the first time, Riki heard him vocalize his pleasure, a sound so erotic and masculine it sent chills down his back. Afterwards, he fell forward onto him for a few moments.

Riki felt a little vexed with Iason for his surprise offensive. The Blondie had never taken him in such a manner before, with no preparation. But at the same time, he couldn't deny that he had been exquisitely pleased prior to his violation. He wondered if his master thought out these things in advance.

As Iason pulled out, he winced.

"I'm sorry, my love," Iason said.

Riki was silent, unsure of how to react to the new appellation, "my love," and equally confused by the secret thrill he felt when he heard Iason say it.

A call came in, and Iason picked up. From the look on his master's face and his hushed voice, he had a feeling it was Raoul. Pushing down the rising tides of jealousy, he quickly dressed, then went out on the balcony for a smoke.

Something about the day felt all wrong. When he looked back, his interactions with Iason seemed far too...comfortable. Then his jealousy over Raoul...and his complete impotency in response to his repeated insults and challenges. And the sex...fuck--he loved it...he no longer even resisted. He didn't even really mind the pain of Iason's violent completion, because it had given him chills to hear his master's rapture. His reaction to Iason's new pet name...all wrong.

He ran a hand through his hair and sighed. Fuck. He was losing himself. He really was Iason's pet. How had it happened? When had he stopped resisting?

He knew. It began the day Iason had punished him so brutally for his defiance. Since that day he'd been a coward, afraid to do anything that might elicit his wrath. The Blondie master had beat

submission into him, just as he'd promised. He'd become the pet of Iason Mink.

And he couldn't...just couldn't let that happen. He had to do something. He had to fight. Even if it meant certain punishment. Something. Anything. Suddenly, he was struck with an idea and quickly went back inside, snatching the vial that still sat on the table, and with a glance at Iason, who followed his movements with a perplexed look, rushed back out to the balcony. He held his arm over the ledge, preparing to drop the vial when suddenly Iason's hand gripped his wrist painfully.

"Don't you dare drop it," he whispered fiercely, almost challengingly.

Gazing back defiantly, he opened his hand, releasing the vial to its doom below.

"Such a silly way to begin a new rebellion," Iason sighed. "You're like a child. Why this fascination for throwing things off the ledge?"

His master's grip on his wrist tightened as he turned and strode back into the house, dragging his pet with him.

"Let me go you, fucking bastard!"

"What brought all this on, Riki? Was it the call from Raoul?"

He remained silent, staring back at him defiantly.

"I see. You're back in your Bison armor, then?" He shook his head, mystified. "It's a step forward, then two back with you, Riki." He leaned close to him, smiling. "I'm beginning to think...perhaps you enjoy being punished."

Summoning up his courage, Riki spat on his Blondie master's face. Iason wiped the spit from his face wordlessly with his gloved hand, straightening up and struggling to control a sudden influx of rage that threatened to shatter his composure. Up to this point he had been enjoying playing along with what he thought was a little game of harmless rebellion, his pet only wanting a little attention and teasing, soft discipline. Now he realized Riki was in earnest.

He whipped off his glove, tossing it aside, then pulled Riki's head back by the hair. He struck him, hard, across the face.

“You'll regret that,” he whispered, striking him again. “Daryl!”

Daryl came running, having watched the entire scene anxiously from the shadows.

“Apparently, Riki wants to be thoroughly punished again. And since he's back to playing the untamed mongrel, it's appropriate we put him back in chains. Help me undress him. Then bring me his collar.”

Riki struggled as the two men stripped him, but to no avail. Then Iason dragged him to the bedroom, slamming his wrist into one of the hanging cuffs of the T-stand and snapping it shut with his fist, then the other wrist, and then each of his ankles on the cuffs below. Riki was now standing spread-eagled, completely naked. Iason put the hated metal collar around his neck, fastening it firmly.

“This should start to get pretty uncomfortable in awhile. I'll wait until then to continue.” Iason turned without another word, leaving Riki feeling exposed and vulnerable. His Blondie master was right. It wasn't long before his arms started to ache and he found himself breathing harder.

Iason stepped out onto the balcony, puzzling over what had just happened. Riki's sudden rebellion was bewildering. He found that he was trembling. No one had ever spit on him before, and for it to come from his pet...he struggled to push back the hurt and anger. Only minutes before, they had shared what he felt was their most erotic pairing ever. There was no doubt in his mind Riki had loved his ministrations. His moans had driven him nearly to the brink, and when his pet said his name...he had been unable to resist then taking him as he had--satisfying in that moment a longing for violent acquisition that he had harbored for countless years--and so deeply pleasurable was his release that he had even cried out, something he had never done before. Why, moments later, had Riki behaved so childishly, so suddenly rebellious? Why had he...spit...on him? There was no question that he was deliberately provoking him for some reason.

He tried to unravel the events of the day. He had thrown the vial over the ledge--was he really so angry over Iason's unprepared

entry? Or was it some sort of jealousy over Raoul? This last thought was almost pleasing to him--no, most definitely pleasing--yet he felt unconvinced this was the cause of Riki's rebellion. The dark glare in his pet's eyes betrayed no trace of affection. It was as though all his efforts to tame his pet had been inexplicably swept away, all their hours of pleasure together counting for nothing.

He sighed. How long would it take to tame the black-haired mongrel? It had already been two years. Iason was growing frustrated. What would it take? What would he have to do to bend the will of Riki the Dark?

It seemed to Riki that Iason had left him there for an eternity. His arms and buttocks were starting to cramp. Despite his discomfort, Riki felt proud of himself. At least he still had some self respect. When his Blondie master finally returned, he leaned against the wall, arms folded across his chest.

“Feeling some regret, perhaps?”

“Fuck you, you perverted shithead.”

“I'll be doing the fucking, to use your mongrel phrase.” He unfastened his trouser flap, moving behind Riki, then yanking his head back violently by his hair. “My apologies,” he whispered in his ear. “I would be more appropriately lubricated, but I seemed to have misplaced the vial. So I'll just have to trade velocity for lubrication and ram it in hard.”

“You sadistic fuck.”

Riki felt Iason's gloved hands pull his hips back into position, the accommodating springs of the T-stand allowing this shift. He steeled himself, determined not to utter a single sound. But when Iason plunged violently into him, he was unable to keep from crying out in utter anguish. His master's earlier conquest had left him raw, and this new onslaught was too much.

“Have mercy,” he whispered.

“What's that? Begging for mercy already? What happened to all that defiant resolve?”

“If you only knew...how much I hate you,” he said darkly.

These words filled Iason with pain and rage. He began thrusting, hard, erratically, eliciting tortured moans from his pet. But as the onslaught continued, the painful sensations were replaced by pleasurable ones, and Riki began gasping. Soon it was evident that his ring had been set to prevent ejaculation, its restriction leaving him desperate for release but unable to attain it.

He could tell by Iason's sudden silence that his master had arrived at his peak. He gritted his teeth, jealous of his pleasure. His gasps betrayed his frustration.

"Ah yes. I thought that was an especially nice touch, don't you agree? Denying you the pleasure of consummation?"

Iason began kissing his neck, reaching around with one hand to stroke his rigid organ, causing him to moan through gritted teeth. It was pure torture. Riki despised the T-stand. Even the kasey-whip was better than this--at least that punishment was over quickly. His entire body was cramping and aching now, and the sexual frustration was unbearable, especially with Iason's heartless teasing.

"Why don't you just whip me," he said, finally. "And let me out of this thing."

"Or...I could whip you while you're in it," Iason proposed.

Riki fell silent, having failed to consider that more disagreeable option.

But his Blondie master had no intention of using the kasey-whip again, not after the incident with the C-20. He pulled out and moved around to face his pet. "Since you've decided to behave like a child, it's fitting I punish you like one." Iason leaned closer. "I seem to remember predicting you'd get a spanking."

"You're an asshole."

The Blondie smiled. "It's unwise to provoke the hand that's about to beat you."

"Fucking bastard!"

Iason moved into position and struck his pet with all his strength on his exposed buttocks, eliciting a choked cry. He knew it had to hurt--even his own hand was stinging. A second strike induced a louder response from the mongrel. Then Riki endured

the most brutal spanking he'd ever had in his life at the hand of his Blondie master. By the time Iason was finished, he was crying like a child, his head hanging down in abject misery.

Iason pressed against him from behind. "Ready to obey me now?" he whispered.

Riki sobbed. His backside burned excruciatingly. But he had an even bigger problem. He desperately needed to empty his bladder. He had waited as long as he could.

"Iason," he said. "I need...I really need...to..."

Iason walked around to face him, leaning forward. "You need to relieve yourself? I was waiting for you to ask." He retrieved a container, and to Riki's mortification, held it under him and took up his member. "Go ahead."

"Iason...I can't...do it, not with you watching. Could you call Daryl?"

"I could. But I choose not to."

"Not with you holding me...please, Iason. I can't. Don't you...get it?"

"Must feel pretty helpless. You can hold onto your pride and suffer, or you can relieve yourself and debase yourself in front of me."

Iason smiled slightly, his eyes glimmering a cold blue.

Riki swallowed, closing his eyes with shame. He relieved himself, the hot stench of his water humiliating him.

When he opened his eyes, the Blondie was smiling triumphantly. "Good boy," he whispered, disappearing for a moment.

Then, much to Riki's extraordinary relief, Iason snapped open one of his cuffs. His arm fell down limply, then his other arm was released, and then his feet. Iason carried him to the corner near his bed and fastened his collar to the restraining chain. His pet fell over, curling up in a ball, falling asleep not long after.

The Blondie watched him, smiling. Except for one occasion, the proud mongrel had endured his punishment without pleading for

relief. Although he didn't understand Riki's rebellion, he admired his resolve.

For several days Riki was kept in chains. Iason reverted back to forcing him to copulate while he watched, something he knew his pet detested. Though he longed for sexual intimacy, he wanted to make his pet long for it even more.

After some days, he was walking near his pet when Riki whispered, "Iason."

He froze, and the sound of his pet's chains announced his approach. From behind, Riki put his arms around his Blondie master, pressing up against him.

Iason closed his eyes, drinking in the moment, then whipped around, unfastening the chain from Riki's collar, and carrying his pet to the bed. The eagerness of his mongrel was nearly matched by his own as master and pet reestablished their sexual understanding. His pet surprised him with uncharacteristic initiative, reaching down to stroke his master boldly, his exploring Iason's body in tantalizing caresses.

Iason was beside himself with lust. His kisses were perhaps a little rough as his need mounted. Yet he wanted to satisfy the hard-won obedience of his pet first. Flipping Riki onto his back, he pushed his thighs toward his shoulders to reveal his waiting portal. "You liked this, didn't you?" he whispered, penetrating with his tongue.

Riki's moan left no question as to his pet's answer.

The Blondie pleased him in a loving, unrushed exploration that was completely incongruent with his own desperately urgent need. Moving up to take his pet into his mouth, he continued stimulating him with his finger, a combination clearly welcomed by the dark-haired mongrel. Riki's moans increased in frequency and pitch, rising with his ascent to rapture, and then, his muscles contracting so hard his torso lifted off the bed, he voiced his impassioned surrender to ecstasy.

Iason moved on top him, kissing his throat as he waited for his pet to recover. The mongrel finally opened his dark eyes, they were shining; a slight smile turned the corners of his mouth.

“Did you like that?” Iason asked.

Though Riki didn't answer, his smile grew a little more pronounced. Now Iason rolled onto his back, holding out his hand to his pet. “Straddle me,” he said, holding himself ready with one hand.

Riki climbed atop his Blondie master, slowly easing onto his waiting organ, stopping when he experienced discomfort. Iason, with shaking hands, took hold of his hips and forced their continuing descent, unable to wait for his pet to adjust. The grimace of pain on his pet's face paradoxically stimulated him, and he closed his eyes, opening his mouth slightly. Then, when he was fully inside his pet's wet embrace, he lifted the mongrel's beautiful body and then dropped it as he lifted his pelvis with a little thrust, testing out this new method of enjoying his pet.

To his surprise, Riki pressed his hands against his chest and initiated lifting movements himself, allowing Iason the luxury of concentrating on thrusting, though he continued to take hold of his pet's hips and direct the speed of their joining. They paired thus, master and pet, each gazing intensely at the other, rebuilding in those few minutes all that had been destroyed, releasing all that needed to be forgiven. More than the exquisite pleasure that permeated his release, Iason was transported by a look of affection in Riki's softened eyes that he had never seen before, a look that spoke to his heart words he had desperately waited to hear.

Fate

“But...why does he have to come here?” Riki paced the floor in front of his Blondie master, who watched his consternation with amusement from his chair.

“I already told you, my pet. We need somewhere private to discuss some sensitive issues.”

Riki scowled, feeling extremely put out. He hated Raoul.

Iason smiled. “There's no reason for jealousy, Riki.”

“I'm not jealous!” he shouted.

“Calm down,” Iason said sharply. “Now, I expect you to be civil to Raoul. I know there's no great love between the two of you. Still, his position demands your respect. I'm warning you, Riki. If you disobey me on this, don't think I won't turn you over my knee and take my hand to you, in front of Raoul, if necessary.”

The mongrel fell silent, fully convinced that his Blondie master wouldn't hesitate to administer such humiliation publicly. He knew because Iason had done it before.

Iason chuckled. “Stop sulking. If it bothers you so much, why not go to the Saloon, or down to the pavilion?”

But he had no intention of leaving Iason alone with Raoul. He didn't trust the Blondie, and though he pretended otherwise, he WAS jealous. He couldn't help it. He couldn't stand the thought of Raoul, who he despised, having been Iason's pairing partner. And from what he could see, Raoul wasn't finished when it came to Iason. In any case, he planned to keep a close watch on the visit, if only from the balcony.

“Come here, pet. On your knees.” The Blondie unfastened his trouser flap. “I want you to relieve me before he arrives.”

Riki obeyed, kneeling, and sliding his hand around his fully erect shaft. Iason let his head fall back against the back of the chair. Exploring the Blondie's length with his tongue, Riki then slowly took him in his mouth. Iason began stroking his head, running his fingers through his dark, shiny hair.

“That's very good, my pet.” Then when Riki reintroduced his tongue, he whispered, “Yes. Just like that.”

Riki became aware that someone was at the door as Daryl rushed to answer it.

“No, don't stop,” Iason said, urgently. “Yes, pet. Like that.” The Blondie gave a slight, breathy moan, then grabbed hold of Riki's arms in a way that signaled his impending release. With a sharp intake of his breath, he closed his eyes and arched his back, thrusting up into his pet's mouth. Iason's trembling told Riki he had ejaculated, that and the hot essence that shot down his throat.

Riki moved to get up but his Blondie master stopped him, bending down to kiss him. “You're a good boy,” he whispered. As Riki rose and Iason fastened his trousers, Raoul entered the room, taking in the situation with obvious displeasure.

“Riki, go out to the balcony,” Iason instructed.

As Riki passed Raoul, their eyes met in a mutual glare. The mongrel smiled smugly, wiping his mouth suggestively. He was certain that Raoul had seen something, or at least had discerned what had just gone on there.

“Iason,” Raoul said, darkly, after Riki had left. “Must you flaunt your perversions?”

“I have no idea what you're talking about, Raoul.”

“You just had that filthy mongrel service you. I can see it in your eyes.”

“Even if that were true, it's no concern of yours.”

“Iason--”

"I didn't invite you here to argue about this." Iason rose, moving to the bar. "Would you like some wine?" It's quite perfect. One of our clients from the trade convention left a bottle."

Raoul fell silent for a moment. "Sometimes I think...you get pleasure in hurting me."

Now Iason turned, a faraway look on his face. "I thought the same once about you. Or have you forgotten that you were the one who betrayed me?"

Unable to reply, Raoul hung his head.

The beautiful Blondie laughed softly. "Come now. That's all ancient history. What we need to discuss is a new security concern Katze has brought to my attention. It seems he's picked up on a sharp increase in activity, and he thinks there may be a strike sometime in the near future."

"You're relying on that old Furniture for your intelligence?"

Iason sighed. "Raoul, I've told you before. He's the best there is. And no Blondie would be trusted in the underground to get the kind of information he can. The point is, he's convinced me there's a threat."

"What do you suggest we do?"

"I want to reconfigure the system. I think we may need to reprogram the entire grid. If someone has the access codes, who knows what could happen."

"Do we really need to go that far? Have you any idea how much work that is?"

Iason took a sip of wine, slowly shaking his head, then sighing. "I can't think of an alternative that's safer. That's why I brought you here--you're the only one I know I can trust."

"I'm glad you think you can trust me," Raoul said softly.

Iason moved away to the window, looking out over Tanagura. "It's all really so fragile," he sighed.

Now Raoul came up behind him, putting his hands on his waist and whispering in his ear, "Iason. My offer still stands."

"I gave you my answer," he replied, attempting to move away. Raoul grabbed him, pushing him up against the window, pinning

his wrists above his head. Iason's wine glass shattered, sending shards of glass and wine down the Blondie's arm.

"I refuse to sit by and watch you throw away everything for that mongrel!"

Riki watched the interaction between the two Blondies from his ledge on the balcony, desperate to know what they were talking about. They seemed quite animated, and this made him nervous, so he got up and began pacing. He didn't like the way Raoul moved in so close when talking to his Blondie master. When he saw Raoul make his move and then pin Iason to the window, he didn't even think.

"Get off him, you fucking shithead!" Riki came running into the room, and managed to get a solid punch in Raoul's face before the Blondie picked him up and threw him across the room.

"Raoul!" Iason shouted, as the enraged Blondie started toward the mongrel, who was shaking off being slammed against the far wall. Iason reached out and grabbed Raoul's wrist. "That's enough."

"Iason--your arm!" Riki cried. The Blondie's arm was dripping with blood, his glove soaked red.

"Iason...did I do that?" Raoul whispered.

"Stay away from him! You fucking prick!"

"Riki! This is your first and only warning. Back outside. Now." Iason's severe tone left no doubt as to the Blondie's sincerity.

Riki reluctantly retreated as ordered, glaring at Raoul.

"You're not going to punish him?" Raoul seemed incredulous. "You let him come in here and punch me, without even a reprimand?"

"It's not so surprising for a pet to protect his master." Iason was washing his arm in the sink, removing deeply imbedded shards of glass without a trace of pain reflected in his features. In truth, he was quite pleased with Riki's response, feeling it betrayed a concern for him he longed his pet to harbor. "Your hurling him across the room was punishment enough." Daryl, unsummoned, had appeared with some medical supplies, and now tended to his master's

wounds with shaking fingers, then cleaned up mess on the floor, where wine and blood swirled around broken shards of glass.

Raoul put his face in his hands for a moment. "Iason. I didn't mean to hurt you. I just get so angry sometimes...when you push me away."

"Can you pour me some more wine, Raoul?" Iason sighed. "I need to relax, and my head is killing me."

The Blondie complied, and the two men returned to the living quarters to sit, and began discussing the security issue again.

"So...when do you think we should tackle the grid?"

"Sooner rather than later. I don't want to, but I'm thinking we ought to start tomorrow. At least get the first quadrant finished." Iason closed his eyes, leaning his head against his chair.

"Are you well? You look a little pale."

"It's just my head. Maybe I'll take something for it."

"Don't get up. I'll call Daryl."

"There's something I want to check anyway." The Blondie rose to his feet and took a step, then suddenly stopped.

"Iason? What is it?"

"It's...beautiful." And with that, Iason fell to the floor, his robe and hair swirling gracefully in his descent.

Riki, having seen all this from the balcony, immediately came charging into the room. "Iason!" he cried, rushing to his Blondie master. "What did you do to him, Raoul!"

"I didn't do anything, you filthy mongrel! He just collapsed!" Raoul rushed to the communications center and buzzed for medical assistance.

Riki brushed the hair from his master's face. "Iason," he whispered, leaning in close. The sight of the Blondie completely unresponsive made his stomach clench, and in that moment he suddenly realized how much Iason had come to mean to him, how much a part of his life his Blondie master had become.

Raoul knelt by the Blondie, taking his pulse. "He's really fast."

"He just...collapsed? He didn't say anything?"

“He said his head hurt. Then he stood up and said...‘it’s beautiful.’ Then he just fell.”

Something clicked in Riki’s mind, something he remembered from the slums. A poison that was used during the gang wars before the revolution. He lifted Iason’s lids, checking his pupils. One was dilated...but the other constricted.

“Agatha,” he breathed. “You hallucinate right before you pass out. They call that ‘Agatha’s Halo.’ People see amazing things. And you get a headache. People usually put it in alcohol.”

“He was drinking wine,” Raoul said, slowly. “And he did say that it was gift...”

“We have to slow down the poison! We have to get him as cold as possible. Put him in the shower. Get some ice!”

Raoul didn’t reply.

“Raoul!”

“I don’t take orders from mongrel pets!” he snapped. “How do I even know you’re right?”

Riki tried to calm down, his heart beating so fast he could barely think. “Raoul. I’ve seen this. His eyes--it’s the only thing that can cause that. The poison affects each hemisphere differently.”

Raoul snorted. “You’re hardly a doctor. We should wait for the medical team to arrive.”

“Please...Raoul...I’m begging you. We can’t wait. He’ll die. I know you care about him. Please, I’ll do whatever you say, just do this one thing.”

The Blondie studied him for a moment, then leaned forward. “All right. On one condition.”

“Anything! We need to move him now!”

“You service me. On your knees.”

For a stunned moment Riki stared back at the Blondie, unable to believe the nature of his request. Wasn’t this the man who so was so violently opposed Iason’s pairing with a mongrel? Raoul gave a slight smile, making his sincerity clear.

“Fuck it. Whatever. Just get him in the shower, Raoul!”

The Blondie immediately stood up, lifting Iason in an easy movement, and rushed him to the shower.

“Daryl! Bring ice...as much as you can!”

Daryl, who had been running erratically through the apartment as though completely disoriented by his master's condition, seemed grateful for a task.

Iason's body was fully submerged in ice water by the time the medical team arrived.

“I'm sure it's Agatha,” Riki said, relating the symptoms.

One of the medics scanned the wine bottle with a molecular detector. “Yep. It's Agatha all right.” He turned to Raoul. “You were smart to cool him down like that. It would have been too late by the time we got here.”

The medical team attended to Iason, and soon the Blondie began moving restlessly. “He just needs to sleep this off--he'll probably sleep at least an hour. He'll be fine...although don't be surprised if he sees the Halo from time to time. And he may, unfortunately, develop some pretty bad headaches occasionally. Now we need to get him dry and put him in bed, get him warm. No clothes, though--we don't want any kind of restriction.”

Iason's wet clothes were removed and his body dried, and then Raoul carried the Blondie and placed him in bed. Riki had tried to assist but was pushed violently aside by Raoul. He watched the Blondie jealously, fuming as Raoul took in the naked body of his old lover without even trying to conceal his designs. Once Iason was situated in bed and the medical team was gone, he turned to Riki with a purposeful look.

“You're still going to hold me to it, after I was right?”

“You agreed.”

Riki sighed. “Let's get it over with.”

The Blondie led him back to the living quarters. “Get on your knees.”

The dark-haired mongrel complied. Raoul unfastened his trousers, revealing his monstrous organ. Riki now wondered if all Blondies were so well endowed.

Raoul grabbed the back of Riki's head by the hair. "Let's see what's so special about you that Iason's willing to risk everything for it."

"Isn't this against your Blondie code of conduct or something? Taking another Blondie's pet?"

"If Iason can break the rules, why shouldn't I?"

"If he finds out..."

Raoul leaned closed. "If he finds out," he hissed, "make no mistake, I WILL kill you."

Riki closed his eyes and tried to transport himself mentally elsewhere, anywhere else, as he began pleasuring the fierce Blondie.

"Move your tongue...just on the head. Yes. Like that."

Riki felt like he would be sick.

"Open your mouth more," he commanded. Now Raoul's breathing was increasing. He took hold of the mongrel's head and began thrusting violently. Riki tried to relax his throat, but found it was involuntarily twitching in his intense mental desire to repel the Blondie. Apparently this produced an unexpected effect.

"Ah, what are you doing? That's good. Keep doing that."

Raoul's excitement was mounting. He closed his eyes, throwing back his head. Suddenly, grabbing the back of his head again, he pulled out, shooting his essence all over Riki's face with a moan that sounded almost like a snarl.

He released Riki, who fell forward onto his hands, the Blondie's semen dripping from his face onto the floor. Without a single word, Raoul fastened his trousers and walked off. Unable to control the flood of emotions that washed over him, Riki blinked, trying to stave off the tears that stung his eyes. He felt extremely dirty and violated. He realized then how lucky he had been to have someone like Iason Mink as master, as opposed to a Blondie like Raoul. As he struggled, he became aware that Daryl was next to him, offering him a damp towel and a drink.

"You see everything, don't you Daryl?" he laughed brokenly.

"Is the Master going to be all right?" he asked nervously.

"He'll be okay. Those Blondies...they're pretty tough."

“About Sir Raoul--”

“Let it go, Daryl. Don't say anything. Got it?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Not long after that, Iason woke up and was apprised by Raoul of what had happened.

“After this, I'm not waiting until tomorrow to begin reprogramming the grid. I'll start on it now, as soon as I leave here.”

“It seems I'm in your debt. Thank you, Raoul.”

After Raoul left, Daryl went into Iason's bedroom. “Is there anything I can get you, Sir?”

“Where's Riki?”

“On the balcony.”

“Send him in,” Iason said, then, “what is it, Daryl?”

“Iason-sama, it was Sir Riki that saved you. He's the one who knew you'd been poisoned. He convinced Sir Raoul to take you into the shower.”

Iason smiled. “I see. That will be all, Daryl.”

So, Riki had come to the rescue twice in the same day. It was almost too much to hope for. And Raoul had been quite prepared to take all the credit for his pet's ingenuity, he realized with some amusement. Iason felt a surge of affection for his pet that wanted immediate expression.

Riki came into the room, hands in his pockets.

“Why the long face, Riki?”

His pet shrugged, avoiding eye contact.

“Come here. I want you under here with me. Take off your clothes.”

Riki complied, undressing and sliding under the sheets with his Blondie master. Iason pulled him close, with his chest to Riki's back. “You feel nice and warm,” he whispered. “Are you afraid I'm going to punish you? You were very naughty coming in to punch Raoul like that. But since I know you were only concerned for me, I'm going to overlook it.” In fact, Iason was extremely pleased with his pet's protectiveness; it had given him no small thrill to see Riki come in swinging.

The dark-haired mongrel could feel his master's arousal, and with shaking fingers, he reached around and took hold of the hot organ, stroking him firmly. "That feels good," Iason said, kissing his neck, which sent chills through his body. "Why so quiet, Riki? What is it?"

"I thought you would die."

The Blondie laughed softly. "Don't tell me you were concerned for me?"

Unable to bring himself to admit that, Riki snorted. "It's just that, if something happens to you, next thing you know I'll be under Raoul's whip."

"I see. You don't need to worry about that. Raoul will never be able to hurt you, my pet...unless you persist in punching him," Iason smiled.

Riki fell silent, shuddering, as he remembered the hateful glare in the Blondie's eyes as he shot his essence onto his face. "But, why would someone want to kill you?"

"You really don't understand my position here, do you? But, let's save this discussion for some other time. Right now I want you, Riki. I want to be in you."

Iason began stroking his pet, who was very much aroused, emitting tiny moans and gasps that he longed to increase. Pushing him onto his back, the Blondie explored his mouth with a gentle kiss, running a hand through the mongrel's dark hair. Riki began sliding his hands down his back, teasing his perineum with suggestive strokes, which he found thrilling. As the passion increased, they began rolling around on the bed. Riki took hold of the Blondie's hair and buried his face in it with a spine-tingling moan.

"Fuck me, Iason," he said, finally.

Inhaling sharply, Iason felt a renewed surge of lust from this mongrel-style request. His pet had never so bluntly asked for penetration before. In fact it was the closest he'd come to truly vocalizing his desire. And his choice of language, so very vulgar, had

a profound effect on him, driving his lust to new heights. "Make me wet first," he whispered.

Riki obeyed, pleasuring him so wickedly with his tongue that Iason fought to reign in his release. "Riki," he breathed. "You're unusually passionate today."

His pet looked up at him, tongue flicking sensually across the tip of his erection, his eyes smoldering with lust. "I'm fucking horny as hell. I want you to fuck the shit out of me."

"Oh, pet." Iason whispered fiercely, lifting him up and throwing him firmly down on the bed. "You excite me beyond bearing." He entered from the front, face to face with his beloved pet. Taking hold of his twitching erection, he began caressing Riki with firm strokes as he moved, relishing the obvious pleasure that contorted his features, delighting in his grimaces and the curling of his upper lip. As his lust increased he found that his thrusts grew more violent.

Riki opened his eyes, dark and glimmering, his mouth now open. "Fuck me...harder," he gasped, with a naughty smile, knowing full well the effect this would have on his Blondie master.

Unable now to stop an instinctive moan in response to his pet's stimulating words, Iason thrust hard once or twice, then felt his irreversible ascent hurling him toward teeth-gritting completion. He was aware of his pet's release as Riki grabbed hold of his arms, his essence spewing across his chest and adding to his already nearly unbearably perfect consummation. Rolling onto his side, he pulled Riki to him. "Come here, my love."

My love. Riki heard these words and closed his eyes, resting his face on Iason's rising chest, relishing the Blondie's warm embrace. Even if he could not bring himself to return these words, he couldn't deny that hearing Iason say them filled him with a sense of peace. He was so relieved that his Blondie master was all right. And the fact that someone had tried to poison him filled him with worry. Today he had, for the first time, acknowledged to himself his growing feelings for Iason Mink, something that he had been feeling for some time but which he had been too stubborn to face. Even if he still desperately wanted to return to the slums, even if he still

longed to see Guy, and race through the streets with his gang, now he could not deny that Iason had a piece of his heart, too.

“You excited me so much,” Iason whispered, pulling him a little closer. “Do you know how much you please me, Riki? My pet.”

Riki sighed. In that moment, that particular day, he found that he did not mind being the Blondie's pet. He didn't put much stock in talk about destiny, did not know if truth was written in the stars, or divined by oracles and dreams. But maybe, after all, this was who he was fated to be...the pet of Iason Mink.

Rains of Passion

The rain fell in torrents over Tanagura, relentless like a mourner crying for a fallen love. Riki once again felt as though he were going slowly out of his mind. It couldn't be possible that his life had been reduced to that of a sex slave. He couldn't get his mind around how he had wound up in Eos, now the elite pet of Iason Mink. More and more his thoughts had turned to Guy; he wondered what his old pairing partner would think if he could see the life he led, if he knew the sexual acts he engaged in on a regular basis. His guilt over his growing attraction to Iason was almost overwhelming; the Blondie could not approach him without eliciting an immediate sexual response, and Riki found that he now actively fantasized about Iason, even initiating the sex. Though he had tried with all his might not to be drawn to the Blondie who had decided to tear him from the only world he knew, his body answered to Iason as if he had been bred only for his pleasure.

He hated Iason. And he...loved him; fuck, his mind was completely twisted up when it came to him. Whatever it was he felt, it was powerful; emotionally, he had been brought to his knees.

Lost in his thoughts, Riki failed to notice that Iason had returned. As soon as he looked up, he knew something was wrong. Anger was evident in Iason's sharp movements, in the way he held his mouth, his tight features, his dark gaze. His Blondie master was furious about something...and Riki had a sinking feeling it had something to do with him.

Iason stood before him, arms crossed on his chest, one hand to his mouth. Riki made a half-hearted attempt to escape his scrutiny by heading toward the balcony, despite the pouring rain.

"You're not going anywhere," he said quietly.

Riki swallowed, wondering what he'd done.

"I just had a very interesting talk with Raoul," he began.

Riki closed his eyes, now having a good idea about what the conversation might have been about. Fucking Raoul, he thought.

Iason watched him carefully. "Ah. So it's true. I was hoping there was some mistake."

He couldn't believe Raoul had told Iason, after threatening to kill him if he breathed a word. He let out a long sigh.

Iason's voice shook as he spoke, his hands trembling. "In fact, I find this so difficult to believe, I want to hear it from your own mouth," he whispered, leaning in close. "Did you engage in sexual contact with Raoul?"

Riki hung his head. "It was just one time, Iason. And--"

"One time, a thousand times! It makes no difference. What matters is you did it." Iason said through gritted teeth.

"Let me explain," he pleaded. "I had a good reason--"

"There is NEVER a good reason," Iason shouted. "I honestly can't believe you'd do something like this, Riki."

"But it was the only way--"

"That's enough! When I want to hear from you, I'll tell you. You're in for it, pet. Come here." Then Iason grabbed him by the wrist, dragging him over to his chair.

"Please, Iason, not like this," Riki begged, pulling against him. "I'm not a child!"

"Hush!" He yanked on Riki's trunks to reveal his bare flesh and then positioned his pet over his knee. "I'm furious with you, Riki. This is going to be a lesson you'll never forget." Iason whipped off his glove, tossing it to the floor.

"Please, Iason!" Riki begged, terrified.

His master then commenced with a spanking that brought Riki to tears within minutes, long before the enraged Blondie let up. The

pain was unbearable, and he found himself kicking and struggling to get away.

Iason's hand was burning and his pet's backside had darkened from his harsh punishment, yet he continued the merciless spanking. He was so angry he could hardly see straight. Riki was now screaming, and he finally stopped.

"You are MY pet," he said, his voice shaking with emotion, "and you are never to touch another Blondie. Is that absolutely clear?"

Riki sobbed his reply, struggling to regain his composure as Iason set him on his feet with one hand. "I'm still quite angry with you. Leave me."

The mongrel stood for a moment, pulling up his trunks with trembling fingers. The Blondie had never sent him away before.

"Go!" Iason shouted.

Backing away in confusion, Riki instinctively headed toward his place of refuge, the balcony. The pouring rain somehow seemed to match his mood, and he found that he was still sobbing, not from the pain of Iason's discipline, although that had been wickedly severe, but out of hurt over the Blondie's rage and rejection of him and the injustice that he should be so brutally punished over an act Riki had so deplored. As he neared the ledge, he began to feel a darkness rising within him that seemed too powerful to fight, and an answer to all his torment suddenly presented itself in his mind, a solution so simple he wondered that he had never considered it before. He climbed up onto the ledge, and then stood, looking out onto the sprawling city below. Smiling slightly, he thought about what it would feel like to soar towards Tanagura, a few thrilling moments to mark his proud exit from his unbearable existence.

Daryl approached Iason fearfully, quite aware that the Blondie was in a particularly foul mood.

"What is it, Daryl," Iason sighed.

"It was the night you were poisoned, Iason-sama. Sir Riki tried to convince Sir Raoul to put you in the shower, but Sir Raoul wouldn't do it. Sir Riki, he began begging him and agreed to

whatever Sir Raoul asked for. That's when it happened. Sir Riki...cried."

Iason listened in stunned silence. Raoul had certainly failed to mention any of these crucial details. Raoul would have him believe that he had tempted Riki to engage in sexual acts simply to prove his unfaithfulness. He sighed, his head falling back onto the back of his chair. When would he learn that Raoul simply could not always be trusted when it came to private matters? He would most certainly be confronting Raoul about it tomorrow.

"Why did you not tell me of this before?" he asked, sternly.

Daryl bowed his head. "I'm sorry, Sir. Forgive me. Sir Riki asked me to keep silent."

"Is Sir Riki your master, or am I?"

"You are my master, Iason-sama. I'm s-s-sorry."

"In the future, I expect you to apprise me of such matters immediately. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Now go. I'll think about whether or not you'll be punished for this."

"Yes Sir. Excuse me." Daryl bowed, backing away.

So his pet had sacrificed himself to his nemesis in order to save his master. And he had rewarded this with a relentless whipping, and in a manner he knew his pet especially despised. "Riki," he sighed. He looked toward the balcony, suddenly realizing his pet had gone out in the pouring rain. It was raining so hard, he couldn't even see him.

A flash of lightning suddenly lit up the balcony, and Iason's heart stopped when he saw his pet standing on the ledge, arms held out.

"Riki!" he shouted, dashing out to the balcony. "Riki, no!"

His pet turned and looked at him with a strange smile, then let his body fall forward.

Iason leapt to the ledge, grabbing his pet before he fell and dragging him to the safety of the balcony.

"Let me go!" Riki screamed.

Iason held him tight. "Hush," he whispered in his ear. "It's all right, my pet."

"It's not all right! It will never be all right!"

Iason comforted him, his arms wrapped tightly around the mongrel's body, while Riki sobbed inconsolably. "I know, my love. Daryl told me about Raoul. I'm sorry that I punished you. I know I was very hard on you."

Riki's body suddenly seemed to go limp.

"I'll make it up to you, pet. I'll find a way."

The downpour had continued unabated, and master and pet were both completely soaked. Iason loosened his grip and turned Riki around to face him.

"Oh, Riki. I almost lost you," he whispered. "Don't you know how much you mean to me?" He pulled his pet to him and hugged him close. "My pet." Then he took hold of Riki's chin and with a look filled with affection, added, "Don't you know...I would have followed you?"

The dark-eyed mongrel, blinking from the drops of rain that fell on his face, looked up at him with such an expression of sweetness that he felt his heart turn inside out. Slowly he leaned down, offering a kiss to his pet, thrilled and relieved when Riki returned his advances and began erotically sucking on his tongue.

Then it was as though a floodgate had opened, their passion matched only by the intensity of the rain. Wet clothing was quickly discarded, their bodies gleaming wet in the light of the twin moons that appeared briefly from behind the rain clouds.

"You liked this, didn't you?" Iason whispered, positioning his pet by the ledge, facing out. "Spread your legs."

Riki complied, realizing with a surge of excitement what his Blondie master was up to. Iason spread him apart, eliciting a slight gasp of pain.

"I'm sorry, pet." Even in the darkness and rain, Iason could see the bruises already forming on Riki's punished backside. He wiggled his tongue erotically past his portal, taking hold of his throbbing erection with his hand.

Riki moaned, shuddering. "Ah, that's so good, Iason," he breathed. "So fucking good."

Whether it was that particular position, or the drama that had unfolded there in the rain, or the rain itself, which continued to pelt down incessantly on the glistening bodies of the beautiful Blondie master and his smaller, though equally beautiful pet, Riki began to cry out in a manner which was unusually expressive for him. "Fuck yes! Oh, fuck yes! Iason! I'm gonna fucking come!" And then his cries of ecstasy were so intense, Iason almost released just listening to him.

He rose, shaking, desperate to send off his own lust in similar glory.

Riki turned, eyes glittering. "What are you waiting for?" he said softly, with a naughty smile.

With a sharp intake of his breath, he positioned himself behind his pet, pressing his aching organ against the enticingly offered portal, and steeling himself to take it slowly.

"Just ram it all the way in," Riki whispered, his hands face down on the ledge. "And fuck me hard. Like I know you want to."

Iason closed his eyes, feeling a shudder run the length of his body. "Oh pet," he breathed. Then, with shaking hands, grabbed hold of his hips and plunged into his depths. Riki cried out, and Iason hesitated, realizing his movements probably also exacerbated the pain of his pet's punished region.

Riki turned and looked back, breathing hard. "Go ahead, Iason."

Then, taking him with lust-driven violence, Iason's acquisition was quickly accomplished, accelerated by his pet's unparalleled submission and seductive encouragement.

Afterwards, they both went inside, finding towels and fresh clothes set out on Iason's bed.

"Daryl is good at what he does," Riki remarked.

Iason didn't reply, having never thought about it before. At the moment, he was a little annoyed with Daryl for having withheld information he wished he had known much sooner.

“He anticipates your every need.”

“As he should.” Iason was matter-of-fact, almost curt.

Riki laughed. “You Blondies really have it made, don't you? If I was a Blondie--.” He stopped, catching himself.

Iason smiled. “If you were a Blondie, what? Tell me.”

“Just...well, I'd get to do the fucking for once.” Riki said with a half-smile, eyes glimmering.

The Blondie studied him for a moment, then smiled. “I think I've discovered a way to make things up to you, pet.”

Riki looked at him incredulously, not quite daring to hope. “What do you mean?”

“I mean I give my body to you, to do as you will.”

“Are you fucking for real?” he breathed.

“Whenever you choose.”

“Fuck! I just came,” Riki lamented.

Iason laughed. “No need to be in such a hurry. My offer doesn't carry an expiration on it.”

Riki was beside himself with excitement, having fantasized for quite some time about taking his Blondie master. Now he was consumed with plans on how it should be accomplished.

Iason was amused with his pet's preoccupation with his promise and found that he was curious as to what Riki would do, anticipating the event with no small amount of pleasure, wondering if rains that fell on Tanagura could ever match the rains of passion that flooded over them now, each day taking them both a little deeper into the borderlands of paradise.

Chapter 9

G-Strap

Iason and Raoul worked silently, both of them weary from hours of reprogramming the Eos security grid. They had worked all day and still the first quadrant wasn't finished. Raoul frequently turned to look at Iason, puzzled by his coldness. The Blondie hadn't made eye contact with him the entire day. They were the only ones left on the floor, everyone else having left hours ago. Most of the lights had been turned out, leaving the two Blondies in a small pool of light surrounded by darkness. Iason's hair shone with merciless beauty under the overhead lamps, driving Raoul mad with desire to bury his face in it, run his hands through it, pull it back and ravish Iason's tender throat....

"Let's give it a rest," he said, now feeling disconcertingly aroused.

"Not yet." The extraordinarily fast tapping of Iason's keystrokes had continued unabated for hours and now seemed to increase.

"We've been here fourteen hours."

"Go home if you need to, Raoul," Iason said, in an exasperated tone.

Now Raoul moved in front of him, blocking his access to the computer. "Iason. What is it? You've been like this all day."

With a sigh, Iason looked up, meeting his gaze with a decidedly icy stare. He paused for a moment. "What you told me yesterday, Raoul, wasn't altogether accurate, was it?"

Raoul swallowed. "I don't know what you mean," he lied.

"You haven't changed, have you?" Iason whispered. "There were at least a few rather significant omissions in your story, as I'm

sure you're well aware. In other words, you deliberately misled me, no doubt hoping Riki would take the brunt of my anger."

"Did he?" Raoul asked, with transparent hopefulness.

"None of your concern," Iason snapped. "But I must say I'm rather disappointed in you. No. Too weak--I'm furious with you. Not only what you did--which I absolutely deplore, by the way--but also the way you tried to manipulate me with it."

"But you won't listen to reason when it comes to that filthy mongrel!"

Iason pushed his chair back and stood up, his face close to Raoul's. "You have absolutely no right to interfere in my private life. And you know you had no right to touch my pet."

"Iason," he began, reaching out to touch his shoulders.

"No!" Iason shrugged him off angrily. "How many times must I tell you? There's nothing between us, Raoul!"

Raoul was silent for a moment. "You're so heartless."

Iason laughed. "I'm heartless? How quickly you forget your own transgressions. Raoul. This is the last time we're having this conversation. I have no feelings for you. I am not going to pair with you again. I do not answer to you when it comes to my private affairs. You're an excellent worker and a good friend--at least most of the time--but don't think I won't have you transferred out of Eos if you persist in this type of behavior."

Raoul had the decency to hang his head, running a hand through his hair with a sigh.

"One more thing, Raoul. If you ever touch him again, I'll break every bone in your body." Iason's eyes confirmed the threat, glimmering with such an angry glare that Raoul instinctively backed off.

Iason turned, then stopped, whipping back around. "And, since you touched him in the first place--." He swung with all his strength, hitting Raoul with a hard punch across the face that knocked him into a desk and sent a terminal crashing to the floor.

"Now we'll call it a day," he said, turning on his heels to leave, his robes swirling behind him as he walked.

Iason smiled to himself. That was something long overdue, he thought, flexing his fingers and not even minding the pain. He laughed softly. That was easily a 20,000 credit piece of equipment he'd just destroyed, and he didn't even care.

He decided to stop by the pavilion, as he had several matters to attend to. As soon as he entered the pavilion, several attendants rushed to him. "Lord Iason, what an honor. How can we help you?"

"Where's Yousi?" he demanded.

The attendants exchanged nervous glances. "Sir Yousi might be...away at the moment."

"He's conveniently away every time I come here," Iason said wryly, "and I'm tired of wasting my time chasing down that pathetic coward. Yousi! Show yourself! You can't hide forever!"

With obvious reluctance, Sir Yousi appeared from behind a curtain, bowing with exaggerated deference.

"I'm sure you know why I'm here. Because of your foolish mistake, I nearly beat my pet to death."

"Yes, Lord Iason. A terrible, tragic error. I'm so tremendously, truly..." the man seemed to be searching desperately, though ineffectively, for the right words, "disrespectfully sorry."

Iason tried to suppress an instinctive smile at the man's botched word choice. He leaned close to the Blondie, towering over him by nearly a foot. "Are you...sure...you're disrespectfully sorry?"

"Yes Sir," he stammered, then seemed to consider the matter, "I mean, no! Certainly not! What I meant was inexplicably sorry."

Unable to help himself, Iason threw back his head, laughing. "Yousi, your imbecility... may have just saved you."

"Oh! I'm glad we ordered those, then."

Smiling, Iason shook his head. "I suppose I can't fault you for being a complete idiot."

Yousi blinked, shifting his weight nervously. "Lord Iason, of course, I meant to tell you this before, but you are welcome to anything you need here, free of charge, of course."

"As it happens, I do need a new kasey-whip." Iason had decided that Daryl would have to be punished for withholding critical

information, and though he had no immediate plans to use the whip on Riki, its mere presence was useful in encouraging obedience.

“Ah yes. We have the entire line. What class number would you like?”

Iason leaned close to him. “I'll tell you which class number I'm not interested in. Or perhaps you can guess.”

“C-20?” he stuttered.

The Blondie smiled. “That's correct.”

“Yes, Sir. We keep all those in the back...now.”

“I'm glad to hear it. I'll see a C-18. No...C-16.”

“Yes, Sir,” Yousi said, noting Iason's downgrade with curiosity. “Although you realize the C-16 doesn't have a retractable buffering system.”

Iason was silent, considering. He wanted something that he could wield without restraint, so not too thick, yet he wanted some protective mechanism.

“Might I also suggest the new G-strap? You should be able to use it without breaking the skin, and it's quite effective.” Yousi lowered his voice. “It's made especially for male pets. The strapping releases a potent stimulator that causes sexual arousal.”

Iason felt his heartbeat increase a bit, immediately realizing the possibilities.

“Let me see it.”

Yousi showed him a long inch-wide strap with a large handle. “You turn it on like this,” he said, snapping his wrist firmly. With a loud crack and then a low hum, a golden light was emitted from the strap like a halo.

“What does that do?” Iason asked.

“It's has a slight buffering protective effect, but mostly it's to scare the pets. It makes a loud crack with each strike.”

Iason laughed, a low, rich sound that betrayed his recently acquired penchant for domination.

“What if it's used on Furniture?”

Yousi shrugged. “Shouldn't have any effect...other than pain. Although you can override the stimulator release here,” he said,

pointing to a small button. He shut off the G-strap, holding it out to Iason. "Like to give it a try?"

With a slow smile, Iason took the device, delighting in the intimidating crack it made as he flipped his wrist to turn it on. Testing it out with a few small snaps, he moved over to the target pole, then unleashed his full fury with a deafening strike. Whipping his arm back, he took a step forward and struck again, his hair swinging and robe swirling as he moved. He was completely oblivious to the audience that watched his performance in hushed awe; attendants and pets in sheer terror, Blondies with admiration and respect for the most powerful Blondie of Tanagura--Iason Mink, head of the syndicate, Jupiter's golden boy and sole direct report.

Iason was completely enamored with the G-strap. He already longed for Riki to make a transgression so he could have an excuse to use it. "You mentioned the stimulator--what if it's used in conjunction with a D-type pet ring?"

"Ah," Yousi said with a slight smile. "Of course. Well, it uses the same class of G-wave technology, so the effect is cumulative and complementary. It will make the pet quite...eager to perform."

Iason could barely contain himself, feeling a surge of arousal just considering the possibility. "Your vocabulary seems to improve when you're talking business, Yousi," he commented, wondering what the man had been like before Jupiter had tinkered with his mind. Yousi had been foolish enough to incite Jupiter's wrath, and he had lost everything--position, property, even part of his cerebrum. For a brief moment, this gave him pause, wondering if Jupiter would ever turn against him, but then he quickly dismissed the thought.

Yousi shifted his weight, uncertain of how to reply. "Will the G-strap be satisfactory, then?"

"It'll do." Iason said, suppressing a smile.

"Very good. Is there anything else, Lord Iason?"

"Yes. A molecular detector."

“Certainly. This one's top of the line,” he said, pointing out a model that had been shipped in from the outer rim. “It can detect every known substance within this system as far as Alpha Zen.”

“Perfect,” Iason said. “I'll take both.”

Back at the penthouse, Riki had been through a frustrating day, beginning early in the morning when he found he had no access privileges. He pounded on the door that led the balcony, furious. “Why won't it open?”

“I think it's because the Master has banned you from the balcony. He is afraid you'll try to jump off again,” Daryl said nervously.

“Fuck.” Riki put his back to the door, then slid down to the floor. “I'll go crazy without fresh air.” He sighed. “Maybe I'll go for a walk, then.”

“I'm sorry, Sir Riki, but you aren't allowed to go out. Sir Iason said I am to watch you to be sure you don't harm yourself.”

“Fucking Iason,” he muttered. “I'm not going to do anything!”

“But...you did try to jump off the ledge. He is only concerned about your safety.”

Riki sulked for a bit, then contemplated a way to get even with his Blondie master. He would insist on redeeming Iason's offer that very night, just one day after it had been put to him. The Blondie had promised that he could do what he would with his body, and Riki was going take him up on it. He spent the rest of the day fantasizing about it as he paced restlessly through the penthouse.

When the door finally slid open with a hum and Iason entered, Riki immediately appeared to confront him, angry and frustrated. The implement carried by his Blondie master stayed him, and he felt his heart turn over when Iason gave him a pointed look, placing the device firmly on the bar counter.

Riki's thoughts raced. What had he done now?

“Good evening, Iason-sama,” Daryl said. “Are you hungry?”

“I've eaten. Bring me some wine.” Iason went to his chair, sitting down with a sigh.

“Right away, Sir.”

As Daryl went to the bar, his eyes fell on the G-strap, and he froze for a moment.

"Yes, Daryl," Iason said, softly. "I hope you are ready for your punishment. I've decided we need to take care of that tonight."

"Yes, Sir, I am ready to be punished." He brought a glass of wine to his Blondie master, hanging his head. Iason scanned the wine with his new molecular detector, pleased with the device.

"What's he being punished for?" Riki demanded.

"That's not your concern, Riki."

"This is bullshit," he muttered.

"Careful, Riki. I'm quite anxious to try the G-strap out on you, so you'll be next tonight if you keep it up." Iason watched Riki with gleaming eyes, secretly hoping his pet would misbehave.

But Riki fell silent, unenthusiastic about a second night of discipline.

"Perhaps I'll tell you. He's being disciplined because he kept important information from me concerning you and Raoul."

"What!" Riki cried, looking as though he intended to say more, and then biting his lip.

Iason smiled. "And that's why you'll be administering the punishment, pet."

Riki's horrified expression was priceless, and Iason watched, fully expecting him to lose his composure. "I refuse," he said, defiantly.

"Come here," the Blondie ordered.

His pet came reluctantly, dragging his feet. When he was within reach, Iason grabbed his wrist and gave him a hard spank. Riki winced.

"Still a little sore, I think? Are you sure you're up for more discipline? Not that I wouldn't absolutely enjoy administering it. However, for your sake, I suggest you mind me, pet."

"Yes, Sir," Riki answered, almost inaudibly.

Iason's heart beat faster. "What did you say?" His pet had never addressed him as "Sir" before, and he found it gave him a slight thrill.

“Yes.” he shot back, his eyes glimmering darkly.

The Blondie chuckled softly, taking a sip of wine, then rising to his feet to retrieve the G-strap. He flipped his wrist smartly, the strap smacking in the air with an impressive crack, as he looked directly at Riki. His pet's eyes widened, his mouth opening slightly. The golden aura surrounded the strap, emitting a low, menacing hum. Iason smiled, holding the implement out to his pet, who remained motionless.

“Take it, pet.”

“Please, Iason. Don't make me do this.”

“Take it,” he said sharply. “Now.”

“Please, Sir Riki,” Daryl whispered, his eyes wide with fear, “I'd much rather have you do it.”

“That's right. Think of this as a favor to Daryl.”

With a sigh, Riki retrieved the G-strap, and Iason returned to his chair. “Daryl. Take off your shirt, face the bar, palms on the counter.”

Daryl did so, and Riki was surprised to see long whipping scars on his back. Iason's handiwork, no doubt, he thought. No wonder Daryl was so submissive.

“Riki, take off your shirt, too.”

“Why?” he demanded, hand on hip, then, seeing Iason's irritation, obeyed, tossing his shirt off to the side angrily.

The Blondie took in his pet's beautiful upper body, the taut musculature and dark, copper-gold skin, feeling a surge of lust inflame his loins, anxiously anticipating the flexing and rippling of Riki's muscles as he administered the punishment.

“Daryl,” he said, raising his voice. “You know why you're being punished. I am quite disappointed in you. Let this be a warning to you. Next time your punishment will be more severe.”

“Yes, Sir. I am sorry, Sir.” Daryl's voice wavered with indisputable fear.

“Riki. I will be able to tell if you hold back. Don't stop until I tell you.”

His pet shot him a dark look.

“Daryl. You are going to be punished now.” He nodded to Riki, who turned away with a scowl, then brought his arm back and struck Daryl hard on the back, the formidable crack merging with Daryl's anguished cry. Satisfied that his pet was putting his strength behind the G-strap, the Blondie then concentrated his attention on the beauty of his mongrel in motion, the flexing of his muscles and the sweat that began dripping from his glistening skin. He became quite aroused, longing for gratification. His attention finally drifted back to Daryl's cries, which were quite compelling.

“That's enough,” he said.

Riki spun around, furious. “What were you trying to do, kill him?”

Iason was tempted to punish this remark with a turn under the G-strap, but found that he had other more pressing needs. He held out his hand to retrieve the punishing implement and his pet slammed it into his hand, glaring at him, the sweat dripping off his face.

“Go take a shower,” he said.

Riki turned to Daryl, who was still sobbing. “Daryl. Can I get you anything?”

“Obey me, pet!”

His eyes dark with anger, Riki turned and made for the shower, kicking his shirt when he encountered it on the floor.

“Daryl.” Iason said softly. “I feel certain we won't need to repeat that again.” He reached out, stroking his hair for a moment. “You may retire to your quarters tonight, to do as you please. I won't be needing you.”

Daryl, now calmed by his master's unusually gentle manner, braved a look at Iason, who now showed no trace of anger. “Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir,” he whispered.

Now Iason went to the shower and could hear Riki muttering under his breath. He removed his clothing and slid the door open, stepping inside.

“What are you doing in here?” Riki demanded.

“That should be quite obvious.” Iason smiled, taking in his pet's completely naked form, which was especially appealing in its wet state.

“I'm really angry with you right now.” Riki had even contemplated playing his trump card and taking Iason, but the mood somehow wasn't right, as he was far too annoyed to truly enjoy it.

The Blondie made no reply, but moved closer, reaching down to touch his pet ring, which like magic triggered an arousal process far too pleasurable to ignore. With a gasp, his pet took a step backwards until his back was against the shower wall. Iason moved in close, pressing his body against him, and taking his mouth in an exceptionally erotic kiss that expressed his own urgency. “I need you, pet,” he whispered. “I can't wait.” He inserted a finger to make his intention clear, then flipped Riki around to face the wall. He lifted him up, sliding him onto his aching erection, and then positioned him on the wall where he found the most pleasurable penetration. He pinned him there, the small mongrel's feet not even reaching the floor as he thrust into his pet. Closing his eyes, he savored his pet's tight embrace; he was so stimulated that it only took a few moments in this position to reach completion.

Afterwards, he knelt down and attended Riki's arousal, his pet quite engorged and anxious for release. As he loved his pet with his mouth, Riki rested his hands on his head, gasping and twitching, then moaning. “I'm still angry with you,” he said through gritted teeth, then spread his legs apart a little more, thrusting into his master's mouth.

You just wait, Riki thought. I'm going to take you, and I'll take you hard. Relishing the thought, the dark-haired mongrel threw back his head and released his pent-up lust onto the warm, erotically inviting tongue of his Blondie master.

Emergence

Riki had paced restlessly the entire day, beside himself with aggravation. He was desperate to get out of the penthouse, or at least gain access to the balcony, his private haven. To exacerbate matters, Iason had been working extraordinarily long hours the past two days, which frustrated his ability to confront his Blondie master about the issue. The previous day had not proved convenient for such a confrontation, given Iason's punishment of Daryl. Riki was still angry about that--particularly about being the one who had to administer it.

Finally exhausted, he sat slumped in Iason's favorite chair, watching Daryl, who moved through the penthouse as though nothing had happened the day before.

"Daryl," he said. "I'm sorry...I know I hurt you."

Daryl smiled. "You were only following Master's orders, Sir Riki. I've done the same to you."

"That's true," the mongrel conceded. "You have quite an arm, too."

"As do you. But--I hope you'll forgive my saying--it's nothing compared to Sir Iason. That's why I was so glad it came from you."

"Are you insulting my disciplining capabilities?" he smiled.

"No, you were most unpleasant." Daryl leaned against the bar, his arms crossed on his chest.

"You're right, though. Iason is a wicked bastard when it comes to punishment. I assume he gave you those scars on your back"

Daryl blinked. "Those? Oh, no. Not at all. In fact, Sir Iason rescued me from the master that did that."

Surprised at this revelation, Riki sat up. "He...rescued you?"

"Yes. I was being punished because I had tried to sneak out to visit my sister. Sir Iason had come to see my master on business and, finding him so occupied, offered to buy me on the spot. Thank Jupiter my master agreed; I've been with Sir Iason ever since."

"Has he ever disciplined you before yesterday?"

"Certainly, in the beginning, when I was more rebellious...like you," he said with a smile. "But nothing like the whippings I endured under my first master."

Riki pondered this for a moment. "So...you have a sister, Daryl?"

The brown-haired, grey-eyed youth hung his head, silent.

Riki, sensing his discomfort on the subject, took out his smokes and lit one up.

"Sir Riki, I told you, the Master does not allow you to smoke inside."

"The Master can go fuck himself. I can't go outside to smoke and I can't wait any more."

As he took a deeply satisfying drag, the door hummed open and Iason entered. Upon perceiving Riki engaging in the impermissible activity, he sighed.

"Pet. I have told you. Smoking is forbidden inside."

"Then give me back my access privileges," he snapped, and then, under his breath added, "asshole."

"Good evening, Sir Iason," Daryl said, rather too loudly.

"Riki. Put it out. Now."

"Fuck you, Iason. Have you any idea what it's been like, being cooped up in here all day? And now you're telling me I can't smoke?" Riki took another deliberately long drag.

"Sir Riki," Daryl whispered, "you'd better do what he says. He's not in a good mood."

"I don't fucking care what his mood is. I'm finishing this smoke whether he likes it or not."

The Blondie made no reply to this, but simply stood, hand on one hip, staring at his pet's rebellion in disbelief.

“Would you...like some wine, Sir?” Daryl asked, desperately trying to deflect the situation.

Ignoring him, Iason began slowly walking toward Riki, who continued to smoke.

“I told you to put that out,” he said, his voice low and menacing.

“And I told you to go fuck yourself. Give me my access privileges back!”

Now Iason reached down, grabbing Riki's wrist so tightly that his pet dropped the smoke with an anguished yelp. Stepping on it to put it out, Iason then bent and picked up the extinguished butt, holding it up between his middle two fingers. “Was this really worth it, Riki? Don't you know what it will cost you?”

Now Riki leapt to his feet, giving Iason a furious push. “Bastard!” he yelled, pounding his fists onto the Blondie's chest. “I hate you! I'm sick of all your bullshit! Caging me up like this!”

In an effortless motion, Iason took hold of his pet's wrists, pinning them behind his back. He leaned close to his face. “This is just going to make it worse for you.”

“Iason,” Riki pleaded. “Just let me go onto the balcony. I can't stand it.”

“Now's not the time to be discussing your access privileges. The topic now is how you'll be punished.”

He sat down in the chair, positioning Riki firmly on his lap, still pinning his hands behind him.

“Daryl. Bring me that wine now.”

He pulled his pet against him so that he could whisper in his ear. “It's been awhile since you've been quite this deliberately naughty. Actually daring to strike me. Oh pet. I'm so looking forward to punishing you tonight. I can't wait to hear you beg for mercy.”

“You...twisted fuck.” Despite his sharp words, Riki's voice betrayed rising fear and uncertainty.

“Yes...you should be afraid. After last night, you certainly know what the G-strap can do. I'm quite anxious to try it out on you. My guess is you'll be quite responsive--you're still bruised, I think?”

Which is why I'm so surprised you're so eager for punishment tonight."

"Iason...you can't keep me caged up like an animal. I'll fucking go out of my mind. Please."

"It's too late to talk your way out of being punished, pet. And your little rebellion was not the best way to introduce the issue."

"You're...a fucking asshole."

"I admire the way you're not afraid to dig yourself in deeper. Are there any more insults you want to try out? You seem eager for tonight's punishment to be especially severe."

Angry and frustrated, Riki now spat out the first thing that came to mind, something he knew would really rile his Blondie master. "I enjoyed sucking off Raoul. More than you." A complete lie, but an assertion he knew would enrage Iason.

After a stunned silence, Iason laughed in a low, menacing way that turned Riki's stomach.

"Oh, pet. You're really in for it."

"Your wine, Sir," Daryl said, his hands shaking as he offered his Blondie master the glass.

"Daryl. Bring me the G-strap."

"What did you expect me to do, Iason? Dammit. I went the whole fucking day without smoking. You have to know that's torture."

The Blondie made no reply, sipping his wine with a slight smile.

"What are you smiling about? Fuck," the mongrel fell silent for a moment, now realizing his imminent peril. "Iason, how about we settle this another way? Let me suck you...just how you like it." With uncharacteristic aggression, Riki turned and nuzzled Iason's neck, kissing and then biting him gently.

Though his pet's offer and advances elicited a tempting surge of carnal agitation, Iason wasn't about to abandon his chance to put his pet under the G-strap. "Yes, you will pleasure me the way I like it. After you've been punished, pet."

Daryl had now returned with the implement, and held it out to him, hands trembling. Putting down his wine glass, he took the G-

strap, then set Riki on his feet, releasing him. He stood up, walked toward the bar and then turned. With an assertive, almost violent flip of his wrist, he activated the G-strap, its intimidating hum and golden aura mesmerizing his now visibly anxious pet. Iason stood, one hand on his hip, the G-strap slowly undulating like a snake in his other hand, his eyes dark with anger.

“Get undressed.”

“You're a fucking prick!”

“Not helping you, pet. Undress. Now.”

Riki obeyed angrily, throwing his clothes with obvious frustration.

“Face the dining table, palms on the table.”

As the mongrel reluctantly complied, Iason was somewhat surprised to see the dark bruises along his pet's buttocks and thighs. This was going to hurt Riki quite a bit, and he marveled at his pet's rebellion in view of his compromised state.

He approached his pet. “Spread your legs more,” he said, then began snapping the G-strap for effect. He was consumed with a sudden desire to take his pet, positioned so invitingly against the table, his flesh bearing the marks of his recent punishment.

“Not that it will make any difference, but is there anything you'd like to say, Riki? Retract one of your comments, perhaps?”

His pet turned and shot him a black look. “Fuck you, Iason.”

“I see.” Iason smiled, though he felt a new infusion of anger rising to disrupt his composure. He flipped the G-strap threateningly a few times, observing Riki's flinching with some satisfaction.

“Pet. You're going to be punished now.” With that, Iason took a step back, then with all his strength sent the G-strap flying, striking Riki's buttocks with a deafening crack.

Riki cried out in agony, unable to believe the intensity of the pain. “Holy Jupiter,” he whispered in despair.

“You have such a short memory when it comes to discipline, Riki.” Iason whipped his arm back and struck his pet again, and

then again, relishing his pet's anguished cries and desperate appeals for mercy.

The Blondie paused, pacing, and flicking the strap with fearsome cracks designed to terrorize his pet.

"Iason...it's unbearable," Riki breathed.

"You had plenty of opportunities to obey me, pet, and each time you chose to deliberately challenge my authority. Now you must accept the consequences and bear your punishment."

"Please...please stop, Iason," his pet pleaded. "I'm begging you."

"No, pet. I must teach you to submit completely to me. You behaved disobediently, and now I must punish you accordingly."

"It's enough punishment! Please, Iason! I can't take any more!"

"I'll decide when it's punishment enough. And you'll take it, pet."

Iason then delivered a thorough strapping to the miserable mongrel, who voiced his torment in increasingly ragged cries. Riki, while in utter agony from his master's punishing blows, was experiencing a perplexing phenomenon. He was becoming decidedly sexually aroused--rather extraordinarily so--having developed an erection that felt ready to burst. The confusion of the simultaneous sensory inputs of painful and pleasurable sensations now affected his cries, which changed from near screams to anguished moans.

Iason watched his pet's developing arousal with delight. Though he couldn't see Riki's erection, he could tell by the way his pet pushed his hips back from the table, and from the way his breathing had changed as well as his altered cries that he was stimulated. The Blondie had found this particular session of discipline particularly arousing as well, and now he found himself frequently adjusting himself, anxious for sexual gratification.

With a flick of his wrist, he switched off the G-strap, tossing it aside. Riki remained in position, moaning.

"Turn around," he said, softly.

Slowly, his pet complied, his face now contorted with lust. "What did you do to me?" he whispered.

"The G-strap has a special feature," he replied. "Perhaps you can guess what it is."

"Iason...fuck...I really need..." Riki reached down and began stroking himself.

The Blondie walked toward him with a smile. Riki leaned back against the table. "Please...touch me," he begged, spreading his legs further and presenting himself with a thrust of his pelvis.

Iason complied, taking hold of his pet's engorged organ and offering a few tantalizing strokes as Riki gasped. "I really need to come," he whispered.

Iason leaned close. "You'll pleasure me first, pet."

"Anything. Iason, please."

"Take me in your mouth." Iason unfastened his trousers, revealing his own matured erection.

Riki dropped to his knees and began exploring him hungrily, passionately, as though he could not get enough of his Blondie master. Stopping a brief moment to wet his finger in his mouth, he inserted it enticingly past Iason's portal, thrusting in a decidedly seductive manner. This was something his pet had never done before, and Iason closed his eyes, overcome with the intensity of the sensations that swept over him. His pet's tongue and mouth were mercilessly pleasuring him, his finger offering a new erotic dimension to the experience.

"Oh pet," he breathed, and then, before he had meant to, he climaxed in the mongrel's mouth.

Riki stood up, his eyes shining. "I need you," he said urgently, holding his erection in one hand. "Please...suck me."

Smiling at his pet's mongrel-style request, Iason knelt down gracefully, sitting back on his heels. Eagerly, Riki pushed his organ up to his lips. "Lick me...ahh...yes. Like that." The mongrel reached down to rest his hands on his Blondie master's head. "Open your mouth now," he whispered, then with a moan, thrust gently into the

Blondie's warm wetness, each thrust moving a little deeper into Jason's mouth.

Jason looked up at him, sliding his tongue erotically along the shaft as Riki withdrew and then thrust again. His pet moaned, throwing his head back. "Oh, Jason...you're total fucking heaven."

Now Riki grabbed onto Jason's hair, thrusting more violently. "I need...ah! I can't wait," he cried, then with a series of ascending cries, announced his imminent completion.

"Oh fuck! Fuck yes!"

Then he was coming, releasing his unusually potent lust with a cry of ecstasy that filled Jason with indescribable satisfaction, sending chills down his back. Riki fell to his knees, then uncharacteristically leaned up against his Blondie master, who wrapped his arms around him. They remained thus for a few moments.

"You really...hurt me," Riki said, finally.

"You deserved it," Jason said firmly, though softly.

"But I really liked--"

"Yes? What did you like, pet?"

"I liked...oh...Jason," he sighed.

The Blondie realized then his pet was developing another erection, much to his delight and the mongrel's complete bewilderment. He moaned, looking down at his throbbing organ in wonderment.

"I need...I need to come again."

"So it appears." Jason smiled.

There was a short pause. "Jason...I want to fuck you."

Momentarily surprised, Jason quickly remembered his promise to the mongrel. "Yes, pet. If you are ready, tell me what you want."

Excited, Riki leaned forward to whisper in the Blondie's ear. "Take off all your clothes and lie face down on the bed. And where's that new vial you bought?"

"It's by the bed, on the table." Jason smiled, obeying his pet's request to disrobe. Then he moved to the bed and lay prostrate. "Like this?"

“Spread your legs more.”

Iason did so, closing his eyes when he felt his pet running his hands across his body, and then spreading him with his hands.

Riki took in the Blondie's body with growing lust. Iason truly was physically stunning, his skin a flawless ivory, his physique the perfect mix of tight muscle and long, lean lines, his silky blonde hair sprawled irresistibly across his back and on the bed. The slightest move created a rippling and flexing of his muscles that sent Riki's heart racing. The Blondie's buttocks were especially enticing, with just the right amount of curves and firm fleshiness to especially appeal to Riki. As he spread Iason apart, the sight of the Blondie's seductive entrance was more than he could bear; he bent down and tasted him, flicking his tongue into his portal.

Iason gasped, thrilled. Riki teased him for awhile like this, and then moved over to the side of the bed to retrieve the vial. He took Iason's hand and poured the oil into it. Iason smiled, and then, with intentional skill, applied the oil with merciless sensuality.

Riki began thrusting and moaning, fully tempted to expel his lust right then and there. With some difficulty, he withdrew, then climbed onto Iason. He lay there for a moment, trying to regain control, kissing Iason's neck and nibbling on his ear, sending chills through the Blondie.

“This is probably going to hurt you,” he warned, secretly hoping that it would.

Iason suppressed a smile at his pet's confidence, knowing full well the mongrel would give him nothing but pleasure. Though Riki was certainly well-endowed for a pet, he was no match for a Blondie like Raoul, who had taken Iason countless times. And there was something unique about Blondie physiology that Riki didn't yet know, but was about to discover.

Riki moved down into position, spreading him a bit more and pressing himself up against his Blondie master, savoring the moment. Gripping the smooth hips of the Blondie firmly, he thrust with all his strength, his engorged phallus sinking into the hot, tight inner sanctum of Iason Mink. Crying out from the exquisite grip of

the Blondie's embrace, for a moment the mongrel remained motionless, holding his breath, relishing the depths of Iason. Then he began slowly moving, thrilled and awed by the fit of his Blondie master. Though he might have been disappointed and dismayed had he perceived the fact that Iason had shown no sign of discomfort on his violent entry, he was so overcome with his own pleasure that he was quite distracted from this discovery.

"Holy Jupiter," he breathed.

Iason was similarly transported with pleasure, adoring the feeling of his pet fully inside him and his intoxicating moans.

"Ah....Iason," Riki moaned, when he felt what seemed to be contractions, a seductive twitching against him. "What are you doing? Ah! That's fucking...amazing!" The mongrel was enthralled by his Blondie master, who continued to squeeze him erotically, relentlessly, exciting him beyond words.

He grabbed hold of Iason's shoulders, thrusting with abandon, delighting in his tight depths and seductively responsive embrace. He had never experienced anything like it, not even his best session with Guy. Nothing came close. It was simply the best fuck he'd ever had in his entire life. As he moved toward his peak, he began grunting with each thrust, feeling almost animal-like in his acquisition, stimulated beyond bearing. Waves of excruciatingly sweet pleasure pushed him into oblivion, where he floated on lingering surges of ecstasy. As he drifted back into awareness, he rolled off Iason with a long sigh, then winced as the bed met up with his punished backside.

Iason watched him with shining eyes. "Did you like that, pet?"

Riki replied with a moan, running his hand through his hair. He was at a loss for words, and he gazed back at Iason in amazement. "You...are all Blondies...like that?"

With a laugh, Iason pulled his pet to him. "You'll never find out, pet," he said, with mock sternness.

"Iason," Riki said after a moment. "Will you ever let me do that again?"

“That depends on how good you are.” Iason answered, then pulled him close, kissing him gently.

They lay together thus for some time, master and pet, both reflecting on the events of the day. Iason was pondering how much he had enjoyed punishing his pet, reliving the discipline with deep satisfaction. Riki closed his eyes and expelled an anguished sigh. He realized then that he was connected to Iason in a way that could never be severed. Not now. He would always be Iason's pet. And...what he found most disturbing...was that he was starting to enjoy it. Even provoking his master into punishing him, he realized now, was something that came from a dark place deep within, a part of him that wanted to be punished, wanted to be terrorized by the formidable Blondie, wanted to be taken, dominated, pinned down, forced into submission. He didn't understand it, couldn't explain it. His face felt hot as this revelation pushed into his consciousness, and suddenly, like a torrent sprung loose, he began sobbing, his tears running down Iason's chest.

“There now, pet,” Iason soothed. He assumed Riki was weeping from the pain of his punishment, and he smiled, stroking the mongrel's dark hair.

But Riki was grieving for the loss of his former self, and the awakening of a part of him that he was still too afraid to face. Both master and pet had moved into more clearly defined roles, each secretly delighting in the role of the other, and neither fully understanding the power of the relationship that had now emerged.

Chapter 11

Freedom

“Please. Iason. Give me access.” Riki followed the Blondie through the penthouse, pleading. “Don't leave me locked up in here another day.”

Iason turned and, after studying his pet's unusually fervent expression, reached out to stroke his cheek. “I'm sorry pet,” he said, softly. “But it's for your own protection. Or have you forgotten that you tried to jump off the ledge?”

“I won't...do that again. I swear, Iason. Please, I can't stand it. I'm going out of my mind.”

“No, Riki.”

“Please!” the mongrel reached up and grabbed hold of the Blondie's hand. “At least...let me smoke, then.”

Iason leaned close to him with a slight smile. “You know my answer to that.”

Riki released his hand, frustrated. “How can you be so...cruel?”

“I'm only watching out for you until I'm sure I can trust you...not to do anything foolish.”

Iason donned his outer robe, then turned back to his sulking pet. “Why don't you look in the library and see if you can find a good book? I have quite a collection--the best in Tanagura, it's said.”

Riki scowled.

The beautiful Blondie smiled, lifting the mongrel's chin and kissing him gently on the lips. “When I come home, I'll make it up to you, pet.”

Not in the least mollified by this promise, Riki spent the next hour restlessly pacing the penthouse in a black mood. He was desperate to get out and breathe the fresh air. He longed for a smoke. And he was sore--so sore he could hardly move. All of this tangled together to make him royally pissed off at his Blondie master.

"Go look in the library," he muttered sarcastically under his breath, and then found himself heading there out of sheer boredom. It was a room he had never really explored--mostly because Riki cared little for books. He could read--though not especially well. He never read for pleasure. Reading reminded him too much of his horrid schooldays in the slums, before he and Guy and some of the others from Bison had dropped out and formed their own gang.

The walls of the library were lined with books from the ceiling to the floor. Had Iason read all these? Riki shook his head. There were some things about the Blondie that almost--no, that certainly--intimidated him. He selected a book and thumbed through it. The language was so elevated he couldn't make any sense of it. He put it back and tried another--this one was in some other language. A third choice proved to be a philosophical treatise, the text so convoluted and inscrutable Riki had to laugh. Iason expected him to find something interesting to read here? Feeling intellectually inadequate and a little depressed, the mongrel tried a fourth book. A primer on the anomalies of quantum temporal-spatial relocation? Like he could really get his head around that. All right. One more try, he thought. With trembling fingers, he opened a fifth book. It was a novel...he guessed, but again, written far above his comprehension.

Then, it was as though something within him just snapped. What was he doing here...in Eos, the pinnacle of Tanagura? How was it possible that he--the leader of Bison--was a pet--and the pet of Iason Mink no less? He didn't belong here among the Blondie elite. He was a mongrel from the slums, born and bred in Ceres, accustomed to a crude and vulgar lifestyle, but one that at least gave him a modicum of self-respect. His fancy clothes, this luxury

penthouse, the fine food and wine, these sophisticated books--none of it was right for him, none of it meant anything. His life was worthless; his entire existence now was only to serve the sexual perversions of his Blondie master. Even more humiliating, he had come to enjoy these perversions, even...solicit them. And now, he'd come to realize a part of him even enjoyed Iason's domination and punishment, a revelation so disturbing he felt as though he no longer even understood himself. If Guy only knew the darkness of his heart....

He hated himself. Two years. He'd lost two years of his life, and now he didn't even have a life. He felt lost...and completely alone.

He dropped the book, and then, as if possessed by an inner demon, began pulling the books from the shelves, hurling them to the floor, and then just striking out at everything within his reach. A vase fell from the shelf and shattered. Riki tripped over the books, cutting his arm on the glass fragments and not even caring. He continued his wild rampage, completely oblivious to Daryl, who had rushed into the room and, taking in the scene with horror, desperately tried to calm him down, without success. Daryl had seen Riki upset many times, but never like this. It was as though a tempest had been unleashed, a fury from the torment of the mongrel's soul. Frightened, he rushed to the communications center to buzz Katze.

"It's Riki--he's gone completely insane. I don't know what to do. He's destroying everything!"

"Fuck." Katze sighed, considering. "I think you'd just better call Iason. I'll come over there, too, if you'd like. But Iason's going to find out anyway, and he'll probably get there faster."

"Please come. Hurry! I think he's hurt!"

"On my way."

Then Daryl called Iason with trembling fingers. The Blondie was surprised to hear from his Furniture, who had never contacted him at work before.

"It's Riki. He's...gone out of his mind."

A short pause, then, "I'll be right there."

Daryl raced back to find that Riki had now moved into Iason's bedroom and was proceeding to tear the room apart, yanking pictures off walls, knocking over furniture, ripping the sheets from the bed. From various broken objects Riki had now sustained a number of cuts, blood dripping down his arms.

"Please, Sir Riki," Daryl pleaded. "Calm down. You have to stop this. The Master is coming."

But Riki passed by Daryl as though he wasn't even there, now making for the living quarters where he overturned tables and chairs, smashing fine art objects against the wall. Next he went to the bar, hurling wine glasses to the floor, shards of glass flying everywhere.

"Sir Riki! You're bleeding! Please stop! You're hurt!"

The door hummed open and Iason appeared, assessing the situation in a stunned silence. Then he rushed toward Riki.

"Riki! Stop this at once!"

But it was as though the mongrel didn't even hear, as he continued frantically breaking everything in sight. Iason leapt over the bar and grabbed hold of him from behind. Riki began to scream and kick, flailing his arms wildly. The Blondie managed to pin his arms down and then began whispering in his ear. "Hush. It's all right. Riki. Calm down now. Mind me, pet."

The door hummed open again and Katze rushed in, looking around at the damage in disbelief. "Holy shit," he said, then held up an injection. "I brought a sedative."

"Give it to him," Iason ordered, and Katze did so, administering the injection in the mongrel's deltoid.

Gradually, Riki's rage subsided, and his struggling started to diminish. "That's it," Iason said softly. "There's a good boy."

"He really fucked up his arms," Katze commented.

"I'll get the medical kit," Daryl said, rushing off.

Iason carried his pet over to his chair--one of the few pieces of furniture still upright--and sat down in it, continuing to hold Riki firmly in his arms. He nuzzled against his pet's face and kissed his cheek.

“Oh pet,” he sighed.

Daryl returned with the medical kit and began tending to Riki's wounds.

“What set him off?” Katze asked.

Daryl shook his head. “I found him in the library, hurling books. It was like he didn't even see me.”

“Riki?” Iason whispered. “What is it? Why did you do this?”

Riki didn't respond, staring ahead blankly.

Katze crouched down, looking into his eyes. “Hey.” He waved his hands before the mongrel's eyes, snapping his fingers. “Are you there?” He looked at Iason, perplexed. “It's almost like he's in a trance. I guess it's the sedative.”

Riki had retreated to a place deep within where he no longer had to face the reality of an existence he could not accept. He didn't care what happened to him. He didn't care if he was punished, or even killed. It was better to be dead than not to be free.

Daryl sat back on his heels. “I've finished with his arms.”

“All right, pet,” Iason said, rising and then carrying him out onto the balcony. When the fresh air hit his face, Riki blinked a few times.

“Isn't this what you wanted?” Iason asked softly.

Like a child, the mongrel reached up and grabbed onto Iason's tunic, pressing his face against his chest and closing his eyes. The Blondie cradled him there for some time, puzzling over his pet's behavior. His botched attempt at suicide--and then this complete breakdown...it was obvious his pet was not happy in Eos. He sighed.

Riki was now asleep, and Iason carried him back inside to his room. Daryl and Katze were making amazing progress in restoring order to the penthouse, although the floors were still littered with broken glass. The Blondie lay his pet down on his bed, then undressed him. He wanted to examine his body to be sure that there were no other injuries. As he turned Riki onto his stomach, he was startled by the severity of his pet's bruising, which extended from his buttocks down to his thighs, dark vestiges of Iason's fury. He stroked the punished flesh with a gloved hand. This was too

much. It was no wonder his pet was miserable. He marveled that his pet could even bear such punishment, puzzling over why Riki seemed to deliberately provoke him when he knew full well the consequences of his misconduct. Staring down at Riki's now peaceful face, Iason, for the first time, began to doubt his ability to tame the black-haired mongrel from Ceres. He was starting to think his pet would rather die than submit to his will. And perhaps...he needed to give his pet some of the freedom he so desperately desired. Maybe freedom would prove a better motivator than punishment. Besides, he acknowledged with a discouraged sigh, the discipline seemed to have no effect on Riki's behavior.

Failing to find any other cuts in need of medical attention, Iason now took in the mongrel's naked body sprawled out so vulnerably on the bed. He marveled over Riki's muscular chest and abdomen, the tiny hollows and ripples appealing most sensitively to his carnal desires. Breathing deeply, he realized he was in need of sexual relief, though his pet was in no state to offer much assistance. He attempted to ignore his needs, but then, when this failed to check his growing desire, he removed his glove with his teeth and then, with shaking fingers, unfastened his trousers to advance his arousal. With masterful strokes, he pleased himself, watching his pet with shining eyes. As he neared his peak, he repositioned himself, shooting his essence onto his pet's beautiful abdomen, and then rubbing it into Riki's soft skin. Sighing, he lay down next to his pet, savoring his release.

Blinking, Riki opened his eyes, looking around in confusion and wondering why he was lying naked on the bed with Iason. Then, the memory of his breakdown pushed into his consciousness, and he groaned.

“So you're awake now.”

Riki turned and looked at his Blondie master, who was lying on his side, up on one elbow, gazing at him. “What are you going to do to me?”

“I'm not going to punish you,” Iason answered with a deep sigh. “Although I probably should. Riki. I know you're unhappy in Eos.

And I've come to realize that you'd rather accept any punishment than lose your freedom. So. I've decided to loosen your chain a bit. I'll reinstate your access privileges. And I'll extend them to anywhere in Tanagura--provided you get my permission before venturing out into the city. In return, however, I expect complete obedience, or I won't hesitate to revoke those privileges. Is that understood?"

"Yes," Riki whispered, unable to believe what he was hearing.

Iason sighed. "Some would say this is like rewarding your bad behavior. But, pet, I don't want you to be miserable with me."

For the first time that day, Riki smiled. "Thank you, Iason." Then, touching his stomach tentatively with his fingers, added, "Did you just jerk off on me?"

The Blondie laughed, pulling his pet to him. "You're such a mongrel."

Riki was silent; being so close to Iason invariably aroused him, and, being naked, there was no way to hide his quickly developing erection.

Immediately perceiving his pet's aroused state, Iason began kissing his neck, teasing and biting him the way he knew Riki adored. He reached down to encourage his erection, stroking him with gentle firmness, his sensual touch sending shudders through the mongrel.

Riki felt paralyzed with pleasure, passively accepting his master's ministrations. The Blondie's soft hair was everywhere--tantalizing his bare skin and exciting him with its erotic scent--so distinctively Iason. He began playing with it, letting it slide between his fingers. He loved Iason's hair so much--sometimes he could hardly stand how beautiful his Blondie master was.

He was now fully aroused and his eyes, shining with lust, met Iason's. Riki felt he wasn't in a position to request anything and so could only hope his Blondie master would continue his attentions.

Then Iason kissed him, exploring his mouth slowly and sensually as though for the first time. "Riki," he whispered, "there

are some things you enjoy as my pet, isn't that so?" He kissed him again, harder, running his hands up and down his pet's bare flesh.

"Isn't that so?" he asked again.

A small moan escaped the mongrel's lips as Iason began kissing his chest, moving down his torso with indisputable objective. His tongue flicked seductively along his abdomen, and then Iason stopped, his beautiful blue eyes locked on his pet's face. "Tell me, Riki."

"I enjoy...many things with you, Iason."

"Like what?"

"Like what we're doing now. Please don't stop."

Iason smiled, then continued down, sliding his hand around Riki's shaft and then swirling his tongue over the head, delighting in taste of lust that betrayed his pet's pre-ejaculatory emissions. He explored him thoroughly with his tongue, encouraged by Riki's moans and anxious thrusting, then took him into his mouth.

Riki could barely contain himself once he was in Iason's mouth. Gasping, he reached down to rest his hands on the Blondie's head. "That's so good," he whispered. "Iason...you're so good."

Iason opened his eyes and gazed at his pet as he pleased him, a look so seductive that Riki moaned. It felt so good and he wanted it to last, but something about Iason was just too stimulating. He was too beautiful, too erotic, too intense, too skilled. He tried to hold back, and then the desire to ejaculate was just too overwhelming.

Taking hold of Iason's head, he began thrusting, tiny grunts betraying his urgency. The Blondie relaxed his throat, allowing his pet to copulate in his mouth. Crying out through gritted teeth, Riki released his essence into his Blondie master, who savored his every sound, his every expression.

Riki fell back onto the bed, gasping. As Iason moved beside him, he felt a sudden longing to gather his pet into his arms. He did so, holding him close.

"Iason," Riki whispered, sighing.

The Blondie smiled, nuzzling against him for a few moments. Then he kissed his pet on the cheek and sat up.

"I must return to work. Please help Daryl and Katze clean up the mess you made."

"I'm sorry...Iason. I know I broke a lot of things."

"Yes, you did." Iason pointed to his pet's nose with mock sternness. "I really should turn you over my knee right now. And don't think I won't punish you severely if you do it again."

With that, the Blondie turned and left, leaving Riki to marvel over his master's behavior. He wasn't being punished for trashing the penthouse. In fact, Iason was reinstating his privileges--even giving him additional freedoms. It seemed too good to be true.

Daryl and Katze were equally amazed at Iason's leniency. They had been whispering together, worried about what would happen to Riki. The Blondie's decision to grant his pet additional privileges rather than punish him for his remarkable infraction seemed incomprehensible, each of them having endured Iason's punishing wrath on several occasions for lesser transgressions. And then, there was no mistaking what had been going on in Iason's bedroom, the timing a source of great mystification to them both.

Iason returned to work feeling a profound sense of relief. He had a feeling that things would be different with Riki now. Perhaps it was just a gut feeling, but he believed he had found the answer to gaining his pet's obedience. He sighed when he saw Raoul immediately approaching him on his arrival, though felt an inward sense of satisfaction at the bruise that yellowed his cheek.

"Iason, where have you been?"

"I had an urgent matter to attend to, Raoul."

"Jupiter's been calling for you."

Iason felt his stomach lock up at these words. What did Jupiter want now?

Riki's Confession

Iason sighed, pushing back the familiar sense of dread on learning that Jupiter had called for him. He composed himself, putting on his best game face, one that hid his true feelings--how much he truly despised Jupiter.

"Iason," Raoul said, touching his sleeve suddenly, "are these bloodstains?"

The Blondie looked down, realizing then that his struggles with Riki had stained his cloak.

"You'd better not go in there like that. Take mine." Raoul slipped off his outer robe, offering it to Iason with a look of concern.

"Thank you, Raoul," Iason nodded. There were times when the usually annoying Blondie could be a good friend.

Now Iason made his way into Jupiter's sanctum, stopping to pour himself a glass of wine to calm his nerves. As he approached Jupiter, he bowed slightly, sitting down in the only chair in the room, and crossing his legs with deliberately crafted ease. In fact, he felt anything but tranquil, having already been called in to see Jupiter twice that week, once regarding his poisoning and another time concerning the reprogramming of the security grid. He hated the feeling that Jupiter watched his every move. But of course--Jupiter couldn't see everything, and for that he was grateful.

"You altered Z107M's access," Jupiter began. "You've given him high-level access to Tanagura."

"Ah yes," Iason said nonchalantly. "I have some errands I may have him attend to."

“You have Furniture for such matters. It is not typical for a pet to have high-level clearance.”

The Blondie took a sip of his wine, considering. “Z107M is not a typical pet. If you recall, he is a mongrel. The usual rules for pet administration don't apply.”

“As the head of the syndicate, you should be an example to others. Your persistence in keeping this mongrel pet is puzzling.”

Iason bowed his head, averting his eyes. “Certainly, it was not my intent to displease you. But as the head of the syndicate, I think it's appropriate my pet should be unique.”

“Does it mean so much to you?”

“To be honest, I've grown rather attached to him. I find him quite amusing. It's foolish, I know,” Iason gave a little chuckle. “Of course, I could replace him easily enough. But I was hoping you'd indulge my harmless predilection.”

Opening his mouth in a seductive manner, Iason gazed sensually over his wine glass at Jupiter, who immediately altered form to approach him, reaching out to touch his face with the arousing heat of holographic energy.

Iason felt his loins stirring and shifted his position, trying not to betray his discomfort. He hated when Jupiter attempted to arouse him. “So...will you tolerate my little penchant?” he asked, softly.

“Be careful, Iason,” was Jupiter's only reply before shifting back into her statuesque form.

With a slight bow, Iason took leave, smiling to cover his anger. It galled him to no end that Jupiter could have a say in his private life, that he had to practice his obsequious arts to placate her and distract her from his growing attachment to Riki.

Raoul immediately intercepted him on his exit from Jupiter's chambers. “What did Jupiter say?”

Feeling rather disinclined for a conversation on the subject, Iason simply shook his head, moving away.

“Was it about Z107M? Iason.” Raoul moved in front of him as he attempted to return to his computer terminal.

“Not open for discussion, Raoul,” he said softly, sidestepping the Blondie.

Raoul made no reply, but stood, looking after him.

At the penthouse, Daryl, Katze, and Riki had managed to restore the interior to its usual orderly state, although the walls were rather bare. Now Katze and Riki retired to the balcony to smoke.

Katze shook his head. “What the fuck were you thinking, Riki? You're a lucky son-of-a-bitch. Iason might have killed you...or at least sold you off.”

“I know,” Riki answered, softly. “I wasn't really...thinking.”

“You know, you really have it made here. I don't know why you can't see that.”

Riki took a deep drag from his smoke, silent.

“Look. Forget about Bison. Your life is here now. You'll never adjust if you don't let the past go.”

Nodding, Riki let out a deep sigh. “I know. But I can't forget. The taste of freedom just stays in your mouth, even when it becomes bitter.”

The bitter taste of freedom. Rather poetic for a mongrel, Katze thought, smiling.

Now Daryl joined them on the balcony. “How are your arms, Riki?”

“Huh?” Riki looked down at his arms, as if realizing for the first time he was bandaged. “What happened?”

“You cut yourself up something wicked. Don't you remember?”

“Not really.” Riki looked out at Tanagura, feeling a sense of excitement. “I want to go out into the city tomorrow.”

Daryl and Katze exchanged looks. Neither of them could quite believe Iason was going to allow Riki to wander the streets of Tanagura without protection.

Katze put out his smoke on the ledge, then tossed the butt over the side. “Well. I've gotta get back. This has put me behind schedule by half a day.”

“Thanks for coming, Katze, and helping me out,” Daryl said, quietly. “You've always been...a good friend.”

With a slight laugh, Katze rested his hand on Daryl's shoulder. “You can call me whenever.” A look was exchanged between them that was not lost on Riki, who wondered about the friendship between the two. He nodded, almost imperceptibly. It wasn't so surprising that there should be a bond between them. But the connection there spoke of something more, almost a shared sadness. With a slight shudder, Riki wondered what it would be like to lose his manhood, to be completely incapable of sexual response. Would he still think about sex? He finished his smoke, grateful that, even if he had lost everything else, he was still a man.

When Iason finally came home, Riki could tell from the look on his face something was wrong.

“Good evening, Iason-sama,” Daryl said, bowing. “What can I get you?”

Iason looked around at the penthouse, noting its orderly state with a nod. “Wine, Daryl. And an Opiate-6.”

An Opiate-6? Riki noted the request with some concern. “Are you in pain, Iason?”

“Just a little headache.” Iason removed his cloak, closing his eyes with a sigh.

Riki smiled. It must be quite a headache to require an Opiate-6. “I know something for that,” he said, for the first time since his arrival in Eos feeling useful. Guy had been prone to bad headaches, and he had learned a technique that seemed to really help. “Come and sit down, and I'll show you.”

Iason looked at Riki, smiling slightly at his pet's obvious desire to help what he could only describe as the worst headache of his life.

He sat down, then sighed as he felt Riki's warm, strong hands kneading out the muscles in his neck and shoulders. His pet seemed to find every knot, every source of tension, rubbing away the pain with undeniable skill.

“Your wine, Sir Iason,” Daryl said, holding out the wine and the requested pharmaceutical. Iason took a sip of the wine, then downed the painkiller.

Riki shook his head. Only a Blondie could take an Opiate-6 with wine and still be alive.

“Iason. If you like this, I could do a better job if you...took off your clothes and got on the bed.”

The Blondie reached back and took hold of Riki's hand, sighing. “Could do,” he said. “Your hands feel perfect.” Taking another sip of the wine, Iason retired to the bedroom, disrobing in his usual disconcertingly graceful way. Riki followed, taking in the Blondie's firm physique with a surge of lust. “Lie face down,” he said, then proceeded to undress as well.

The sight of Iason's body prostate again triggered the memory of the previous evening's intimacy, and Riki eyed the Blondie hungrily, longing to repeat the experience. He rubbed some oil on his hands, then began massaging Iason's tired muscles, relishing the Blondie's sighs and almost imperceptible moans. It was unusual for Iason to vocalize his pleasure, and when he did so, it invariably aroused him. He was straddling Iason's back, and as he moved down to work his lower back and buttocks, he began trembling at the sight of the tantalizing curves leading to his Blondie master's portal. He administered a deep-muscle massage to his glutes and hips, and as he did so, was unable to resist spreading Iason a bit for a better view. Gritting his teeth, he moved himself up close to the inviting portal, but not quite touching, longing to sink his aching erection into Iason. With great difficulty, he pulled away, working next on the Blondie's hamstrings, which were extremely tight.

Iason felt as though he were in heaven. Riki's massage was simply one of the most pleasurable experiences he had ever had in his life. No one, not even Raoul, had ever thought to relieve his aching muscles in such an exquisite way. In fact, he had never really had a massage before. The strong, firm pressure of his pet's fingers, the unmistakably soothing--even caring--quality of his caresses had transported him to another realm. And, once he was completely

relaxed, he became aware of a change in Riki's touch, a shift from soothing to seductive, from therapeutic to tantalizing. He could feel his pet's erection against his back when Riki lay on top of him, rubbing up against him in a decidedly erotic manner. He smiled.

"How is your headache?" Riki asked, his voice a little husky.

"Completely gone. You were lovely, my pet."

Riki rolled off his back and Iason turned on his side, noting his pet's arousal with satisfaction. Reaching down to encourage his own developing lust, he pulled Riki closer with his other arm, erotically tasting his mouth with his tongue.

The mongrel returned his kiss eagerly, running his hands down Iason's glistening body, his trembling hands betraying his anxious desire. Their kisses became more urgent, passionate. Iason broke away to explore the sensitive curves of his pet's neck, eliciting moans as he nibbled and kissed his pet's favorite erogenous zone. Riki ran his hands through Iason's soft hair, whispering his name.

"Get on your knees, facing away." Iason said quietly.

Riki obeyed, and the Blondie was once again startled by the dark bruises on his pet's buttocks and thighs. He reached out, sliding his fingers down his pet's bruised backside. "You really don't know how to take punishment, do you? I break you and you just come back for more."

"That's because--" Riki began, then stopped.

"Because what?"

"I...can't tell you."

"Tell me, pet."

"It's too...humiliating."

Now Iason climbed onto his pet, pushing him down to the bed and lying on top of him. He suddenly had the notion that his pet had something important to say. "I want you to tell me," he whispered into his ear. "I won't let you go until you do."

"It's because...part of me...enjoys it." Riki felt his face grow hot with shame at this confession.

Iason's heart began beating faster. His pet...enjoyed being punished? He hardly knew how to react to this revelation. The idea

that Riki could have sexual perversions equal to his own was too much to hope for. "Oh pet," he whispered, then rose to his knees, pulling Riki back into position.

Wanting to take his pet without preparation but resisting the urge, he eased into the mongrel, determined to be gentle with him. Suddenly, Riki bucked back, taking him in completely with a series of gasps. Surprised, Iason expelled a held breath, then grabbed hold of his hips, embarking on an acquisition of his pet that bordered on violence. Riki began to thrust back as though inviting deeper penetration, moving down onto his elbows and positioning himself for total possession.

"Riki," Iason said through clenched teeth. "Do you know...what you do to me?" As his pet began stroking himself, Iason reached down to grab his wrist. "Wait, pet. I want to pleasure you."

Then, with a few final thrusts, Iason reached completion, whipping his head back to savor the ecstasy of his sexual release. Withdrawing, he smiled at Riki's obvious discomfort--his erection twitching erratically, his breathing painfully increased. "Lie on your back," he said. Riki happily obeyed, spreading his legs and presenting himself with an anxious little thrust.

Smiling, Iason straddled his pet, reaching down to position him for entry. The look of surprise and sheer delight on Riki's face was priceless. With practiced ease, he slid onto the mongrel, drinking up his pet's obvious pleasure. Riki reached out and took hold of his master's hips, unable to believe the Blondie had climbed onto him, relishing the tight fit and Iason's incredibly erotic undulations as the Blondie moved sensually against him. It was almost too much to bear. And then the contractions began, the Blondie's amazing hidden technique that gripped his phallus like a hot hand, squeezing him.

"Fuck yes," he breathed, letting his semen shoot into Iason's inner sanctum far sooner than he meant to release, simply unable to resist the sensory overload of erotic stimuli provided so effortlessly by the beautiful Blondie.

Afterwards, Riki lay in Iason's arms for a long time. Iason nuzzled up against his temple, kissing his cheek every so often. "My pet," he whispered. He was marveling over Riki's confession, filled with an incredible influx of affection for his elusive mongrel pet. Riki closed his eyes, allowing himself to enjoy Iason's warm embrace and his gently tendered kisses. He found that, at the moment, there was nowhere else in the world he wanted to be.

Chapter 13

Betrayal

“Keep an eye on him. But don't let him see you. I don't want to spoil his sense of freedom.”

Katze smiled, lighting up a smoke. “Understood. I had a feeling I'd be hearing from you.”

“Katze. Be sure nothing happens to him.” Iason's voice had lowered, filled with an urgency atypical for the usually rather detached, unaffected Blondie.

“I'm on it. Don't worry.”

“I'll leave it in your hands, then.” Iason hung up abruptly, having now arrived at the Emporium where he was to meet Raoul for a game of billiards. He was quite worried about Riki, who was going out into the streets of Tanagura for the first time. A week of relentless rain had prevented his pet from exercising his new freedom, but with the fair weather, there was no stopping the mongrel from making good Iason's promise. At least with Katze watching out for him, Iason could have some peace of mind.

Raoul was waiting for him in the private East Room. “How was traffic?”

“Typical,” Iason answered.

“At least it's not a workday. I've set up, you want to break?”

“Fine.”

“It's been awhile since we've done this. I'm glad you agreed to come. And I wanted to apologize--”

“Please, Raoul. Let's just leave it.” With a sharp smack, Iason broke the billiards, sending several balls smartly into their pockets.

The two played together for a good part of the afternoon, breaking down much of the tension that had been building up between them over the past year and restoring the friendship that had kept them close for so many years. For his part, Raoul refrained from bringing up the subject that divided them most--Riki. Iason couldn't resist smiling at Raoul's witty banter; it was a side of him that Raoul rarely showed but that he especially liked.

Whether it was the wine or the pleasant afternoon, things began to get a little friendly between the old lovers. Sensing Iason's reception, Raoul came up behind him as Iason leaned over the table with his cue, pulling him close and kissing his neck, his hands running firmly down Iason's chest to his waist. "Iason. I want you...so badly."

Encouraged by Iason's failure to refuse his overtures definitively, he turned Iason to face him, then kissed him, careful to restrain his passion, and thrilled when Iason returned his kiss. He brought his hands up to Iason's face, cradling the Blondie's fair skin in his gloved hands.

Iason found Raoul's lips familiar, reassuring, and though they had not paired in many years, he immediately remembered what it felt like, tasted like, and a part of him...wished for it.

"Iason," Raoul whispered, then pulled off a glove with his teeth, unfastening Iason's trouser flap and apprehending the Blondie's unmistakable arousal with a slight smile. His own excitement mounting, Raoul began stroking him, exploring Iason's neck with an easy mastery that comes with familiarity, knowing full well exactly how his pairing partner liked to be pleased."I know what you want," he whispered, and with a merciless trail of kisses along Iason's neck, Raoul knelt down.

Iason couldn't deny that he had welcomed Raoul's sexual advances. Perhaps because he was, for some reason, rather erotically charged that day. After all, what was the harm of it? Why should he not have a normal relationship with another Blondie? Yet as Raoul prepared to pleasure him in the way only Raoul really

could, he looked down, suddenly wishing to see someone else kneeling before him. Riki.

"No," he said suddenly, moving away, and attempting to fasten his trousers.

Staring back at him in disbelief, Raoul rose to his feet. "Don't toy with me," he said, his voice betraying his fury.

"It's a mistake. I don't want it."

Raoul grabbed his arms. "You know that's a lie!"

"No, Raoul!" Iason struggled to break away, but found Raoul's grip increasing. "Let me go."

"No, Iason. It's too late. You can't take it that far, and then back out."

"Let go!"

Raoul's answer was to flip him over, unzipping his bodysuit and pulling it down. He slammed Iason onto the billiard table, sending balls flying and cracking. Iason's head hit the table, stunning him for a moment. Before he could respond, Raoul was already inside him, taking him, hard. "Raoul," he whispered, no longer struggling, having realized the futility of any resistance. He knew, from past experience, he was no match for Raoul's strength.

Raoul's breathing and moans increased. "Why...do you torment me?" he hissed.

Silent, Iason waited for Raoul to finish, reflecting now that an entire day of efforts toward restoring their friendship had been swept away. He wasn't even that angry with Raoul, just disappointed, and...hurt. As Raoul reached his peak, Iason found that he almost shuddered--not from sexual excitement, but from revulsion.

Raoul lay on him for a moment before releasing him. "Iason," he said finally. "I...don't know what to say."

"That makes two of us. Would you mind getting off me now?"

A strained silence followed as Iason got dressed.

"I'll zip you," Raoul offered, then, "what are you going to do?"

"Don't know," Iason answered curtly. "I should have you shipped out of Eos. Or worse."

“Iason--”

The Blondie held up a hand to stop further conversation. “Don't want to hear anything you have to say, Raoul.” With that, he left the Emporium.

Riki was beside himself with excitement, finally walking the streets of Tanagura. It had been two years since he had been outside of Eos, and all the sights and sounds made him feel alive, almost like how he used to feel in the slums. Iason had put the extraordinary sum of 100,000 credits under his ID, so that he could make whatever purchases he desired. Heading immediately for a newsstand, he started to purchase his old brand of smokes and then realized that he could afford the most expensive, sought after smoke available--Dark Baccalias. The clerk checked his ID with the retina scan. “Iason Mink's pet, huh?” He looked Riki over, seeming a little surprised. The mongrel nodded slightly; a movement in his periphery had not escaped his notice, and when he heard someone whisper Iason's name, he glanced over to see a group of young men, studying him with dark interest.

He took the smokes and quickly walked away, aware almost immediately that he was being followed. He hadn't gone two blocks when they had moved up behind him. He spun around. “What do you want?”

Before the youths could make their demands known, a vehicle pulled up and from an open window a voice said, “Leave him alone or I'll shoot you all where you're standing.” The gun protruding from the window left no mistake as to the validity of the threat. The boys took off, and Riki took a closer look at the occupant of the vehicle.

“Katze?”

“Get in.”

Riki obeyed, then, seeing his tracer displayed on Katze's computer screen, sighed. “I see. So Iason had you follow me.”

“He was only concerned that something like this might happen.”

“He deliberately deceived me!” Riki punched the dashboard, furious.

“Calm down. Want a smoke?”

Remembering then his purchase, Riki took out his own smokes, holding out one to Katze.

“Dark Baccalias? My. Aren't we refined.” Katze teased, accepting the smoke with a smile.

Riki sighed, lighting up, then taking a deep drag. “Very smooth,” he conceded, closing his eyes.

“I concur,” Katze said, in a mock sophisticated tone. “It has just the right combination of poisonous gases and addictive substances to appeal to my discerning palate.”

Riki opened his eyes, smiling. “You're a total prick.”

“At least I got you to smile.”

Riki shook his head. “Fucking Iason,” he muttered.

“Come on. Are you going to fault him for caring about you? There are not many Blondies that would even give a shit about what happened to their pets. Nor are there many that let their pets wander through the city.”

“Whatever. I'm still pissed.”

“Try not to take it out on the apartment. Although I'm not sure there's anything left to break. Speaking of which...why the fuck are you complaining about Iason having you followed when you got increased privileges rather than punishment after that fiasco?”

“Cuz I'm a spoiled brat, I guess.”

“You're an asshole.”

“Bastard.”

“Mongrel.”

“Furniture.”

“Pet!”

Riki laughed, punching Katze in the arm.

“Ow, goddammit!” Katze suppressed a smile, holding his arm as though in incredible pain. “And here we are. I'm letting you off at Eos.”

“What? I hardly went out at all!”

“Iason gave me strict orders that if anything happened, you had to come back.”

“Fuck! Wait 'til he hears what I have to say about that.” Riki scowled.

“That's between you two lovers. Although if you want some friendly advice, I wouldn't piss him off too often.”

Riki got out of the car, slamming the door. “I don't fucking care if he gets pissed off or not.”

“Have a lovely evening, then, you twisted fuck,” Katze answered with a grin, driving off.

Riki shook his head, trying to stave off his rising anger. A newspaper blew by on the sidewalk and he kicked it in frustration. He felt as though Iason had betrayed him by promising him a freedom he never really intended to give. He knew one thing...he was going to let Iason know exactly how he felt about it....

Chapter 14

Jealousy

Iason was in a foul mood as he walked back to his vehicle. He was angry at himself for failing to unequivocally repel Raoul's advances--he had even responded, despite his countless protestations that nothing remained between them. Now that his position had wavered, Raoul would be even more aggressive. It didn't matter that he had, in the end, taken Iason by force; he knew that for Raoul, a taste of intimacy, however acquired, would only fuel his desire for more. How could he have been so careless? And what was he going to do about Raoul now?

The tall Blondie slid into his vehicle and saw that a message had come in from Katze.

He immediately buzzed him back. "What is it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Nothing to worry about. Just a little potential trouble with the locals, but I took care of it," Katze replied.

"Was he hurt?"

"No. But I thought I should tell you he's a bit upset about your sending me out to watch over him."

"Is that all?"

"Yes," Katze said, after a pause, noting Iason's unusually clipped tone of voice with curiosity.

"Well done." Iason flipped off the intercom abruptly, feeling disinclined to discuss the matter further. The last thing he wanted was to deal with one of Riki's childish tantrums. Just thinking about it made him feel annoyed. If Riki dared to complain about Katze

after he had given him high-level clearance--after he had been so lenient about the penthouse debacle....

Although....

A slight smile now curled the corner of his mouth...it would be a good excuse for some serious punishment. Iason took a deep breath, the day's angst now redirecting entirely at his potentially recalcitrant pet. His hands instinctively squeezed the steering wheel as he sped through the streets, driving far too fast, and not even caring. He really wanted to punish Riki tonight. Really let him have it. He wanted to hear Riki cry out and beg for him to stop. And the thought that his pet might actually want to be punished--might even deliberately provoke him to it--stirred his already excited loins. He had been sexually charged the entire day, which was part of the reason he had so foolishly allowed Raoul's overtures. His own lust had never been satisfied and now was reaching a critical point. As he drove, he unfastened his trousers and began stroking himself, sorely tempted to ejaculate right there in the vehicle. But he wanted to save it...for Riki. After he disciplined him he was going to...he smiled, thinking of Riki's way of phrasing it..."fuck the shit out of him." With great difficulty he fastened his trousers and next began fantasizing about Riki's punishment.

Riki had spent the rest of the day on the balcony, fuming. When the hum of the door announced Iason's arrival, he made his way to the foyer, then leaned against the wall, arms crossed on his chest, glaring.

Iason shot him a warning look, suppressing his secret delight at the certain direction the evening was taking. "Don't start with me, Riki."

"So, that was your idea of loosening my chain? Spying on me?"

"Good evening, Iason-sama," Daryl said. "Can I--"

"Wine, Daryl." Iason said, walking toward Riki and then leaning toward him. "Warning number two. Careful, Riki. You don't want me to punish you tonight. I'm in a very bad mood."

Riki stared after him as he walked off, bristling. "Let me guess. You probably secretly film me here in the penthouse."

Iason made no answer, not caring to confirm that he had hidden cameras throughout the dwelling if he ever had need to monitor his pet's activities.

"Dammit Iason! Answer me." With typical brashness, Riki gave Iason a little push from behind.

Iason whirled around. "Final warning, Riki," he said, sternly, hands on hips. "My decisions are absolute and not open for discussion, pet. I don't want to hear any more about it."

Riki stared back at him, and for a few moments they remained thus, each pondering the other's resolve. Iason smiled at the fire in his pet's eyes, waiting for him to lose his composure.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean--your decisions are absolute?" Riki said finally. "And you can take all your warnings and shove them up your ass."

With a soft little laugh, Iason turned toward Daryl, who had been standing uncertainly for some time with Iason's wine, afraid to interrupt. "Did you scan it?" he asked.

"Of course," Daryl answered.

Iason took a sip, then handed it back to him. "Put it on the bar for now."

Turning back to Riki, he leaned down and said softly, with a slight smile, "you want to be punished tonight, is that it? I warned you, Riki. You're really going to regret it this time." Then grabbing his wrist, he made for his chair, dragging Riki behind him. He smiled when he felt his pet pull against him. Riki hated to be spanked, and he knew it, which was part of the reason he'd developed such a taste for it.

"What? Did you think you'd get to decide how you'd be punished? What kind of punishment would that be?"

"You're hurting my wrist! Let go of me, dammit!"

"That's not all that's going to be hurting," Iason snapped, yanking his pet over his knee as he sat down.

"I'm not a child! Please! Not like this!"

"I'll punish you however I choose. And if I want to put you over my knee and spank you like a child, I'll do so." He bent close to his

pet, whispering in his ear. "What's all this fuss? We both know you like this. Isn't that so?"

Iason removed his glove with his teeth, then pulled Riki's trousers down past his thighs. He let Riki squirm on his lap for a few minutes before he began, then gave him a thorough spanking, stopping only because his own hand began to hurt. Though Riki was trembling and had cried out, he was being unusually obstinate, and hadn't shed a single tear.

Setting Riki on his feet, he stood up, then headed for his desk, popping open the hidden drawer.

"What are you doing?" Riki demanded.

"Oh, did you think we were finished? No, pet. We've barely started." He took out the G-strap with a little smile.

Then Riki, taking in this new development with an inexplicable expression, suddenly dashed out of the room into Iason's bedroom, locking the door. Iason went to the door, delighted with the new game. "You have five seconds to open this door, pet," he said, already overriding the lock codes Riki had entered from the inside. "Then you're really in for it."

Riki made no answer, and Iason opened the door. The mongrel was sprawled out on the bed, completely naked, legs spread seductively as he stroked himself. "This is what you like, isn't it?" he asked, eyes shining. "Wanna watch me come?"

Although a very aroused part of Iason most definitely did want to watch Riki come, he wasn't about to rush the evening. With a firm flip of his wrist, he activated the G-strap, the loud crack eliciting a slight startle from his pet. "Turn onto your stomach," he ordered.

Riki got up on his knees, his thighs still spread apart, and began masturbating harder, his breathing now more urgent. "Let me come first."

"Now, pet!"

"I can't stop!"

Iason fell silent, his own erection now throbbing painfully, drawing his hand. He was mesmerized by Riki's aroused state, and

the way he pumped himself was beyond anything he had watched him do before. The mongrel's body was so sensual, so lean and beautiful. Every muscle in his body straining, Riki suddenly ejaculated, his essence shooting up in hypnotically erratic arches, erupting like a clogged fountain, the spray left dripping from his stomach and thighs.

Falling back onto the bed, his pet obediently turned onto his stomach. Iason took in his body, his buttocks and thighs still red from his spanking, his body relaxed from copulation. Unable to resist, he climbed onto the bed, lying on top of Riki for a moment. "Did you like being punished that much, that you had to had to relieve yourself halfway through our session?" he whispered in his ear.

Riki groaned, too ashamed to admit the truth of it.

"Oh pet," he breathed, then nibbled on his ear and kissed his neck, half tempted to forgo the rest of the discipline so he could move straight to the sex. But Riki had just climaxed, and Iason wanted him excited.

He got up, cracking the G-strap menacingly. He whipped his arm back, and then brought the strap down hard on his pet's thighs with a loud smack. He proceeded to give Riki a good strapping, continuing until his pet's cries began to change, his moans betraying his sexual torment. Iason had lost some of his desire to hear his pet beg for mercy and was now more interested--rather painfully so--in gratifying his urgent sexual needs. When Riki was sufficiently stimulated he flipped off the G-strap and tossed it aside, then undressed.

Iason was so aroused he was trembling. "Get on your knees," he whispered, and as Riki obeyed, he approached him from behind. "Spread your legs more--let your head rest on the bed. Yes. Like that."

His pet's portal in full view, he was unable to resist pleasuring him a bit with his tongue, relishing Riki's moans and the seductive way he instinctively pushed back against his exploring tongue, as though anxious for more stimulation. He began stroking the

mongrel's engorged organ as he pleased his portal with his mouth, knowing full well that this was his pet's favorite position, and that he would reach orgasm within a matter of minutes. Riki's cries increased in volume and frequency, indicating his imminent release.

As his pet began shuddering with ecstasy, Iason pressed himself up to him and, without hesitating, rammed himself in as fast and hard as he could, oblivious to Riki's sudden cry of pain. Pulling back almost angrily on his hips, he took his pet with merciless strokes, releasing the pent-up lust and frustration that had tormented him the entire day. Riki had never felt so good. He was hot and tight, and something about the position allowed deep penetration. He closed his eyes, drinking in the pleasurable sensations that shot through his body. Then, it was all happening, his release was coming, everything was building--he whipped his head back with an almost imperceptible groan, the incredibly sweet realization of his completion almost too much to bear; it was so perfect, so deliciously lovely, so wickedly deep and powerful. Tiny shudders raced up and down his back as he struggled to regain his composure. Slowly he pulled out, then lay down next to Riki, gathering him in his arms.

They were both still breathing hard, and for a few minutes neither of them spoke. Iason felt an incredible sense of relief, as though all his worries and tensions from the day had faded away. He nuzzled against Riki's cheek, kissing him.

Riki sighed. "Iason, I love--," he started, then suddenly stopped, catching himself.

"What?" Iason breathed. "What did you say?"

"I love...when we fuck," he replied, a little defensively.

Iason laughed softly. "I see. As do I, Riki." He turned and whispered in his ear, "You liked being punished tonight, too, didn't you?"

"You liked punishing me. Admit it."

"What? Did you think that was some secret?" Iason smiled. "I fantasized about it, all the way home. I knew you'd be difficult, and I couldn't wait to turn you over my knee."

"I hate when you do that," Riki pouted. "I'll take the strap any day."

"That's unfortunate for you, because I like spanking you too much to give it up."

"Maybe I'll just be obedient and spoil all your fun."

Iason laughed softly at this. "As your master, I don't need a reason to punish you. I can spank you any time I choose for my own pleasure."

"What! That's fucked up!"

"Master Iason," Daryl said from the door. "Sir Raoul is here to see you."

Riki scowled. "What the fuck does he want?"

Iason sighed, agreeing with the essence of Riki's remark, but giving his pet a stern look. "You stay out of this."

He slipped on a robe, and went out to find Raoul helping himself to a drink at the bar.

Raoul took in Iason's state, his tousled hair and sweaty chest beneath his robe, and choked back his jealousy.

"Raoul," Iason sighed. "Go home."

"Not until you let me apologize properly."

"I've told you before. I don't believe in apologies. They're designed to make guilty parties feel better about their transgressions rather than benefit those who've been wronged."

"Fair enough. Let me acknowledge that I know you've been wronged."

"Duly noted. Good night."

"Iason--there was a moment there, when I know you were responding. You returned my kiss. We both know that means you still have feelings for me."

"It only means, if you must know, Raoul, that I was exceptionally aroused at the moment, and my faculties were unfortunately compromised."

"Then I still...arouse you?"

"Do I need to call security? Get out."

"I didn't have a chance to pleasure you." Raoul took a step toward him. "Let me make it up to you, Iason."

"I've already been pleased." Iason gazed back at him steadily, taunting him with a small smile.

"You mean by that filthy mongrel," Raoul spat.

"He's already told you to get out, ya crazy bastard. So get the fuck out already." Riki was leaning against the door of the bedroom, shirtless, an unlit cigarette hanging from his mouth, his hair tousled in way that advertised his recent romp with Iason.

Raoul glared at him for a moment, then turned back to Iason. "Are you going to let him talk to me like that?"

"Actually, I rather agree with him. I already told you to leave."

Raoul shot Riki a withering look. With a little laugh, Riki walked nonchalantly out to the balcony and lit up, leaning against the ledge where he could still have a good view of Raoul in case he did something stupid again.

The mongrel had actually been a little surprised by the conversation he'd overheard between the two Blondies. There were several things that bothered him. One was that it sounded as though Raoul had somehow managed to have his way with Iason. The other--and this was what disturbed him even more--was that Iason apparently had not totally resisted. From somewhere deep within, a dark jealousy began to take form, spreading insidiously, and the more he thought about it, the angrier he felt.

He hated feeling jealous; it went totally against his nature. With Guy, he had felt jealous occasionally, but his old pairing partner had never really given him much reason to worry. With Iason...he felt strangely possessive of the Blondie, as absurd as he knew that was. As master and pet, they weren't even on equal footing. Yet he felt more strongly about Iason than he ever had about Guy, and his jealousy was far more dark and potent when it came to the beautiful Blondie.

He brooded, watching the two men argue by the bar, becoming increasingly agitated.

Pleasuring Iason

“You're just encouraging his disobedience,” Raoul said, hotly. “I can't believe you'd take his side against me.”

“I'm only agreeing that I've asked you to leave. What part of that don't you understand?” Iason stared back icily, one hand on his hip.

Raoul sighed. “All right. I'll leave. But I didn't come here to upset you. I came to--. Iason. I know I hurt you. Can you forgive me?”

Iason averted his eyes, unsure of how he wanted to answer.

“It's just...you mean so much to me, and when I thought you were responding, I just lost my mind,” Raoul whispered. “I wanted you so badly, I wasn't thinking. I've waited so long, Iason.” He sighed. “And your kiss, it was exquisite...”

Iason turned away, silent.

Raoul moved in close from behind, pulling Iason's hair back from his face. “And you...felt so good, Iason; I've missed you so much.” Unable to resist the temptation, Raoul began kissing Iason's neck in just the way he knew the Blondie liked it. Iason opened his mouth with a little gasp, closing his eyes instinctively in response to the stimulation.

“That's it,” Raoul whispered. “Let me make you shake all over. You can take me, this time.”

From the balcony, Riki watched the interaction between the two Blondies with growing displeasure. When he saw Raoul moving close to Iason, then touching his hair and kissing his neck, he shook

his head in disbelief. Why wasn't Iason pulling away? What sort of game was he playing?

Fuming, he watched Raoul slide his hands down Iason's body, and then, unable to bear it any longer, he tossed his smoke aside and walked back inside.

"Get your fucking hands off him," he said darkly.

"Iason, restrain your pet," Raoul said, annoyed.

"I said, let him go!" Riki leapt forward, intercepting Raoul with a flying kick to his abdomen. Now Riki began pounding Raoul with his fists. "No one touches him but me!"

Furious, Raoul punched Riki hard, across the face, sending him crashing to the floor, then started after him. "You're dead," he hissed.

Iason took all this in, stunned. "No, Raoul!" he grabbed hold of the Blondie's arm, who threw him off angrily.

Iason rushed to the communications center and buzzed for security, then retrieved his laser, pointing it at the enraged Blondie. "Touch him and you'll die, Raoul," he said, his voice shaking with emotion.

Raoul turned and, seeing the laser aimed at him, shook his head with a little laugh. "You'd actually kill me to save this filthy mongrel? I don't believe it."

"Believe it."

Security had arrived, admitted inside by Daryl, who had watched the escalating scene with alarm.

"Please escort Raoul back to his level," Iason said.

"Iason," Raoul said pleadingly as he was surrounded by armed guards, "Don't treat me like some criminal."

"Then stop acting like one."

As he was escorted out of the penthouse, Raoul turned to look at Riki. "You'll regret this," he warned.

"Fuck off," was the mongrel's terse reply.

Now Iason turned his attention to his pet, who was still lying on the floor. Riki's actions had surprised him. In truth, he was rather flattered over his pet's behavior, especially his

uncharacteristic remark, "No one touches him but me." But at the same time, he had been quite unruly, attacking Raoul once again.

"I should punish you, pet," he said quietly, suppressing a smile.

"Then punish me," Riki snapped, sitting up. "Why did you let him touch you?"

"I don't have to give an accounting to you," he said softly.

Riki sulked at this. "Did he fuck you?" he asked, finally.

Iason smiled at his pet's thinly veiled jealousy. "That's not your concern, pet."

Riki expression changed, softened, becoming almost pleading. "Did he...hurt you, Iason?"

Iason sighed, crouching down next to him. "A little," he conceded.

"I'll fucking kill him."

"No, you won't, Riki," Iason said sternly. "If you did that, even I couldn't save you."

Riki studied him for a moment, shaking his head. "Do you love him?"

Iason paused for a moment. "Perhaps at one time. Not now."

"Then why," Riki began, then stopped. He reached out and took hold of Iason's hair, caressing it between his fingers. "Please tell me, why you let him touch you like that. He was kissing your neck. He was--"

"Are you jealous, pet?" Iason asked softly, smiling.

"Yes, I'm fucking jealous. Okay? You win. I'm jealous."

The Blondie laughed quietly, then leaned closer and kissed his pet's forehead. "You have nothing to be jealous about. Raoul and I...are old lovers. Surely you know how that is, when your bodies respond to one another out of habit, even if the emotions are no longer there. From my end it is entirely physical."

Riki fell silent, thinking of Guy. He did understand exactly what Iason was talking about, how a kiss from an old lover triggered familiar patterns of sexual response. But it didn't make it any easier for him to know that Iason still responded sexually to Raoul. His

hatred for Raoul went deep, into his very marrow, and the thought of his hands on Iason's body drove him insane.

Now he got up on his knees and pulled back Iason's hair to reveal his neck, then began kissing it the way he had watched Raoul do. The Blondie gasped, allowing his head to fall back as he enjoyed his pet's discovery of one of his own favorite erogenous zones.

Riki pulled away. "Why didn't you tell me you liked that?" he asked, feeling almost hurt.

"I enjoy all the things we do together, pet."

"But...I want to pleasure you...exactly how you like it best...so that you'll never want to be with Raoul again. I want you to tell me how to love your body."

Iason felt his heart pounding a little faster. "Is that so?" He ran his hand through Riki's hair, then drew the mongrel to him, kissing him with a sudden urgency as he pulled him back with him to the floor. "Then...I'll show you...right now." He opened his robe to reveal his naked body and his obvious state of arousal, and Riki began running his hands down his torso, kissing his neck in the newfound manner that Iason found so exquisitely erotic.

"That's good," Iason breathed. "Just like that."

Then, with trembling fingers, he took hold of Riki's hand, showing where he liked to be touched just beneath his pelvic bone.

"Keep kissing my neck," he whispered, now breathing hard, thrilled with the myriad sensations flooding through his body.

"Like this?"

"Yes, pet. Now kiss me."

Riki obeyed, enjoying the seductive flicking of his master's tongue against his own and the sound of Iason's breathing, which had become quite heavy. He had never seen his master quite this aroused, this fast, and it thrilled him.

Now Iason guided him to his most sensitive place between his legs, where his perineum joined with his manhood, instructing exactly how he liked to be stroked there and along his shaft and head. Riki moved down to explore his master as if for the first time, thrilled with Iason's explicit commands.

“Now flick your tongue along the head...ah...yes, like that.” Jason breathed deeply, almost gasping. “Take me in your mouth--just the head, and slide your tongue around...yes,” Jason moaned.

“Exactly so.”

After a few minutes of that, the Blondie took hold of his hand, wetting his fingers, then guided him to his portal. “I want to feel you inside me,” he said. “Like this, and then...I want to be inside you.”

Riki felt his loins stir responsively as his fingers slid inside the hot, tight grip of his Blondie master.

“Move your fingers--thrust them--just like that! Oh, pet.”

Stimulating his Blondie master as directed, Riki watched Jason's growing excitement with glowing eyes. His lips parted, Jason began panting, his accelerating lust sending chills through the mongrel.

“Get undressed,” Jason said, finally.

Riki removed his pants, waiting for further instruction. The intensely erotic urgency in Jason's eyes set his heart pounding, and he wondered what position his master would pick.

“Lie on your stomach,” the Blondie said, pushing his legs together when Riki instinctively tried to spread them. Jason then straddled him, hands first sliding to his waist and then pressing on his back as he entered him from behind. Riki's buttocks were still reddened from his spanking and showed marks from the G-strap. Jason found the markings of his pet's punishment unbearably sexually arousing, satisfying a longing for possession and domination that came from deep within. With one hand he took hold of Riki's wrists and pinned them firmly behind his back.

He began thrusting, first slowly and then deeply and much faster. “Ah yes,” he moaned. “So tight.”

The mongrel pet was a little surprised at his master's choice of position, since it was one they had never tried before. For some reason the way Jason chose to pin his arms behind his back and then straddle him facedown made him feel vulnerable and exposed, which was incredibly stimulating. Jason's grip on his wrists was almost painful, as though he were holding Riki down and taking

him against his will, which the mongrel found indescribably exciting. He also began to appreciate some residual arousal from the G-strap as Iason's increasingly deep thrusts pushed him against the floor. With some difficulty, he raised his hips against Iason's weight a bit to allow just the right amount of pressure, gasping as he realized a second orgasm was imminent.

Iason was beside himself with pleasure, having been prepared so deliciously by Riki in all his favorite ways, and now was taking his pet so erotically in a position he had been saving for just the right occasion. Riki was hot and tight and the sight of his engorged phallus sinking past his pet's firm buttocks into the depths within was immensely stimulating to him. Riki's jealousy was another source of arousal; he was thrilled that his pet had showed such unequivocal possessiveness and now wanted to learn how to please him. Pinning his wrists above his pet's punished backside gave him a sense of control, made him feel very much the master taking his pet, forcing him to submit to his will. Throwing back his head and closing his eyes, he let the intense realization of his completion wash over him, the strength of his ejaculation so potent that he cried out his pleasure, something which he rarely did. He could hear his pet coming beneath him with his characteristic moans and this only served to increase the power of his own release.

Releasing Riki's wrists and balancing himself on his now shaking arms for a moment, head down, Iason withdrew, moving next to his pet and pulling him close. "Riki," he whispered, running his hand through the mongrel's dark hair, "that was so perfect."

Smiling, his pet buried his face in Iason's chest.

Daryl, having watched the entire scene from the shadows, swallowed in amazement. He didn't understand the relationship between master and pet, but he knew one thing. What they had experienced together transcended anything he had ever witnessed before. Whether it was love, or simply physical attraction, Iason and Riki shared something that few people ever come close to finding. He closed his eyes, choking back the tears that welled up with the realization that he could never have an experience like the one he

had just observed--never have a lover that whispered such sweet praises into his ear. Perhaps he would never...have a love at all.

“Lucky boy,” he whispered, wiping the tears from his eyes with a jealous smile.

The Spaces Between

Riki studied Daryl, puzzling over his transparently low spirits. He had been moping around all morning in a manner that wasn't typical for the usually nervous, anxious-to-please youth.

"Daryl," he said, finally. "Is something...wrong?"

"No, Sir Riki."

He sighed. "You're not going to start calling me Sir Riki again are you? Like I'm some kind of prince. I was so glad when you finally stopped doing that."

"Sorry. Riki. I just--want to show you the proper respect. That's my job, to serve you...and Master Iason."

"You can start out by telling me what's bugging you. Did I do something to piss you off?"

Daryl looked directly at Riki for the first time that day. "Oh, no! It's not you...not exactly. That is, it's just--well, you and Master Iason have--a special relationship. And sometimes I just feel a little...lonely."

"I get you," Riki said, after a pause. So, poor Daryl was hungry for intimacy. "What about Katze? He's," now he hesitated, trying to think of the best way to phrase it, "like you."

"Katze?" The look of hopefulness in his gray eyes was unmistakable. "Why did you mention him?"

"Because it's clear the guy has a thing for you, idiot." Riki grinned, giving him a little wink.

"Do you think so?"

"I wouldn't give you false hopes. Nah, I could see it when he was here the other day. He told you to call him--whenever," he said, emphasizing the last word to trigger Daryl's memory.

Daryl smiled. "I guess he did say that."

"So call him up already. I have no patience with people who don't take action."

Encouraged by Riki's prodding, Daryl made his way over to the communications center and placed a call, opting for full visual. When Katze's face flickered onto the screen, he froze for a moment.

Katze sighed. "What's he done now?"

"What? Oh! Nothing. Actually I just called...to talk to you."

"To me?" Katze felt his heart beat a little faster as he lit a smoke to hide his surprise.

"Yes. I was wondering if maybe you'd like to come over sometime. Like tonight even."

Katze took a deep drag, then exhaled with a smile. "That'd be nice, Daryl," he said softly.

"It would?"

Riki motioned at him to keep the conversation going when Daryl froze again in disbelief over Katze's acceptance. "Of course, I'd have to ask Iason's permission first."

Katze nodded, seeming almost to dismiss this possible hitch. "What time should I come over?"

"If you don't hear from me, you can assume it's okay. So then come over at...seven?"

"See you then. Gotta go, there's more work coming in." With a slight wink, Katze cut the transmission, leaving Daryl to stare in amazement at the screen.

"He said yes. He winked at me."

"What did I tell you?" Riki smiled, happy for Daryl's conquest. He wondered what the two of them would do together--whether either of them had sexual thoughts--or if they just missed the closeness that comes with intimacy. A part of him wished he could watch them together, out of curiosity, and because he found Katze particularly attractive. He was exactly the sort of man he might have

pursued, if things had been different for them both. He smiled. But Katze was no match for Iason, whose lethal combination of virility, grace, and intelligent sensuality brought him to his knees--literally. There was nothing Iason could request that he would not do, when it came to sex.

The rest of the day passed peacefully enough; Riki enjoyed a walk near the pavilion, then returned to find Daryl restlessly pacing the penthouse.

"Relax. It'll work out," Riki said, slapping Daryl so hard on his back he jumped, startled.

Riki laughed. "You need a drink."

Daryl nodded. "Perhaps that would be nice...later."

Iason arrived not long after, and his sigh told Riki that he'd had a tough day. He suspected it was because of Raoul, but he didn't want to bring it up.

"Want me to rub out your shoulders for you?" he asked, as Daryl rushed to bring him his wine.

Iason gave a little nod, smiling at his pet's new habit of helping him relax when he came home. "That would be heavenly."

He sat down in his chair with another sigh, and Riki moved behind him. Iason reached out and grabbed his wrist, leaning his head back. "Come here, love," he demanded, and Riki bent down and kissed him. "That's better," Iason smiled.

Then the dark-haired mongrel began rubbing out the tight muscles of his Blondie master, secretly relishing Iason's use of the word "love" when summoning him. Iason had now, on a few occasions, used this word, typically with a casualness that betrayed their intimacy, much to Riki's initial confusion, and now to his utter delight--though he would never admit it to Iason.

Daryl brought Iason his wine, then stood before him, hesitating. "What is it, Daryl?"

"Master Iason, may I have your permission to have a guest--that is, Katze--here this evening?"

Iason seemed a little surprised at this request, sipping his wine slowly. Katze? "That would be fine, Daryl," he answered after a pause.

"Thank you, Sir." Daryl shot a glance at Riki, raising his eyebrows in a way that betrayed his excitement.

"Those two," Riki whispered, as Daryl moved out of earshot, "are perfect for each other."

"Hmmm?" Iason closed his eyes, enjoying his pet's therapeutic touch too much to care about Daryl and Katze.

"Does it feel good?"

"Oh yes."

"I've found a bad knot. Hold on--this might hurt a little but then it should feel good."

Iason winced, and then moaned as the knot was worked out, releasing tension held in his muscles the entire day. "It's amazing what you do...with your hands," he breathed.

Riki bent down to whisper seductively in Iason's ear. "Later I'll show you what else I can do with my hands."

Iason shuddered, partly from the thrill of Riki's whisper and partly from the content of his message. Between Riki's massage and his wine, the Blondie was starting to relax, feeling more like himself, the cares of the day starting to fade away.

"Come sit on my lap, now."

"Want me to get you some more wine, first?"

Iason looked at his near empty glass. "Yes, pet. That would be lovely."

Riki approached the bar just as Katze arrived. Daryl greeted him, his delight so transparent that Riki had to suppress a laugh. Katze wore a sleeveless mesh shirt that showed off his beautifully muscular arms and drew attention to his broad chest, his nipples visible through the mesh. The man was absolutely gorgeous. Even the long, jagged scar on his face didn't detract from his raw physical beauty. Having never seen him attired in such a revealing manner, Riki found that he was staring, much to his embarrassment when he realized Katze had caught him leering.

“See something you like?” Katze asked, grinning.

“I used to have a shirt...like that,” he replied, rather lamely, feeling his face grow hot.

“I like it,” Daryl said, pushing his finger through the mesh. “It's very...stretchy.”

Riki and Katze exchanged looks that communicated their mutual fondness for Daryl's innocence and simplicity.

“Would you two like a drink? Bar's open.”

“Got any cognac back there?”

“Only the best.” Riki held up a bottle of Ambrosia.

Katze whistled. “Wow. That stuff costs a fortune.”

Riki shrugged. “You know Iason. Everything's gotta be top of the line.”

“Can't pass that up. Hit me. What about you, Daryl?”

“Sure. Hit me, too.”

Riki smiled at the way Daryl copied Katze's conversational style, pouring them both some of the caramel-colored potion, then offering Katze one of his smokes.

“Dark Baccalias again? How can I possibly resist? It's just one pleasure after another,” Katze said, accepting the smoke with a smile. He turned to Daryl, twirling the faggot between his fingers. “Where should we go?”

“Out onto the balcony, if you want to smoke.”

Katze gave Riki a little wink and then followed Daryl outside.

Shivering a little from the puzzling realization that someone like Katze could still exude so much sexuality, Riki filled Iason's wine glass and then returned to the chair, finding Iason reading an Arts publication. “There's an Arts Exhibit coming to the Emporium, Riki. It's a good opportunity to make some purchases now that most of my collection has been...destroyed.” He looked pointedly at Riki, who cringed a little under his stern gaze.

Iason pointed to his lap. “Sit.”

Riki crawled onto his lap, feeling like a puppy about to be scolded.

“I'm going to the Exhibit, and I want you to go with me. Of course, as a pet you'll have to wear a collar and chains.”

“What!” Riki cried.

The Blondie took hold of his chin. “Have you an idea as to the fortune you ruined with your tantrum? How many credits do you think that cost me?”

“I...don't know.”

“I'll tell you, pet. Over 1,000,000.”

Riki thought he would pass out. A sum that large...a million credits...surely it was impossible. Was Iason really that wealthy, that he could lose a million credits and seem only a little annoyed about it?

“Perhaps if you developed an appreciation for finer things, you would hesitate before you destroyed priceless works of art.”

“I appreciate finer things,” Riki protested. “Like Dark Baccalias.”

The Blondie stared back at him, puzzled; then, realizing what his pet was referring to, broke out in a loud laugh.

“How is that funny?” Riki pouted.

“By finer things, I meant more than just good cigarettes, Riki. I mean art, music, culture. The things that make a society truly great, that elevate the human spirit.”

Riki stared back at him for a moment, tempted to blurt out his true thoughts. Elevate the human spirit? What the fuck did that mean? “Whatever. Do I really have to go?”

“Yes. I want to show you off a bit. It's common practice to bring pets along.”

“But--a collar?”

Iason laughed softly. “I'll have a special gold-plated collar and chain set made for you, so everyone will know you're no ordinary pet,” he leaned closer, whispering in his ear, “so everyone will know you're the pet of Iason Mink.” The Blondie secretly couldn't wait to take Riki out in chains, the thought of him displayed publicly in such submission giving him a carnal thrill.

“So I guess, flaunting how you keep half of society in chains helps elevate the human spirit of the other half,” Riki said, coolly.

“Don't take that tone with me,” Iason said sharply, with an ambiguous smile that made Riki unsure if he was teasing. “Or do you want another spanking?”

“No.”

“No what?”

Riki looked away.

Iason grabbed his chin, turning his face firmly back to him.

“Say it. No...?”

“No...Master.”

With a smile of triumph, the Blondie released him. Riki sighed, then leaned against Iason, burying his face in his soft hair. The scent of his master's hair always triggered a sexual response, and he began nuzzling against him. Then he moved up, pulling his hair out of the way so he could access the Blondie's sensitive throat, kissing and nibbling him in the way he now knew Iason adored.

Iason's lips parted and he closed his eyes, moaning softly as his pet tantalized him with his tongue and lips, biting him gently every now and then with just the right amount of force.

Now indisputably aroused, Riki straddled him, undulating sensually against him as he moved to the other side of his throat. He could feel the Blondie's hands moving firmly down his body, reaching between his legs and spreading him suggestively. His heart racing, he moved up to Iason's ear.

“Fuck me,” he whispered.

With a sharp intake of his breath, Iason opened his eyes and stood up, still holding his pet, who instinctively wrapped his legs around his Blondie master. In a few quick steps they were in Iason's bedroom, undressing, both themselves and each other, kissing fiercely all the while. Riki pushed Iason up against the wall and then dropped to his knees, feeling powerful with the knowledge of exactly how to pleasure Iason best.

Iason let his head fall back against the wall as Riki began stroking and licking him in all the right places, in exactly the right

way. "That's it," he whispered, between labored breaths, as the mongrel began sucking and licking the tip of his engorged organ. When Riki inserted his fingers and started to thrust, he grabbed hold of his pet's hand, pulling him out urgently, almost violently.

"Get on the bed."

Riki smiled, thrilled with Iason's obvious arousal, then climbed onto the bed.

"Facedown!"

A little surprised at Iason's tone of voice, which sounded almost angry, the dark-haired mongrel shivered as he obeyed the Blondie's command.

Iason went to a set of drawers and opened one, removing some silk ties. Without a word, he grabbed Riki's wrist, tying it to the bedpost.

"What...are you doing?"

"Hush."

Iason moved to the other side of the bed, tying his right hand to the bedpost. Then he moved out of Riki's sight, and the mongrel waited, feeling excited and a little nervous, wondering what his master would do next.

"Spread your legs," Iason commanded.

Riki did so, shivering when the Blondie remained quiet. Then suddenly Iason was on top of him, kissing and biting his neck. He gasped, the weight and warmth of Iason's body unbearably erotic as the Blondie pressed himself teasingly against his portal without actually penetrating.

"You want me to fuck you?" Iason whispered.

The mongrel had never heard his Blondie master use such words before, and a tremendous shudder swept through his body. "Yes please," he said, swallowing.

Then, inexplicably, Iason moved away, and Riki tried to look behind him, perplexed.

Iason sat back on his heels, taking in his pet's vulnerable position with delight. Unable to resist, he brought his hand down, hard, on Riki's bare bottom with a loud spank.

Riki cried out, mostly from surprise, but also from pain, as his backside was quite sore from the previous day's punishment. Iason smacked him again, this time harder. "Why are you doing that?" he demanded.

"Because I choose to." Another spank.

Riki felt helpless, pulling against his wrist ties futilely. "That hurts," he complained.

"How about this?" Iason spanked him especially hard, eliciting a cry of pain mixed with anger.

"Dammit, Iason, fucking cut it out! Prick!"

"Oh," Iason breathed, "now you're really going to get it."

"No! Iason, please!"

The Blondie proceeded to give his pet a spanking that hurt so much on his already sore backside that it quickly elicited tears. "Please stop," Riki begged. "Please."

Once his pet began crying, Iason finally did stop, feeling a rush as Riki's body shook from his sobs. Then he lay on top of him again, licking his tears seductively. "Hush, pet. I'm sorry. I couldn't resist. Now I'll make it up to you."

Then he sat back on his heels again, lifting Riki's hips. "Get on your knees," he instructed. His pet obeyed, and Iason then pleased him in the way he knew Riki liked it best, exploring his portal with his tongue.

The mongrel gasped and moaned, overcome with the pleasurable sensations that flooded his sensibilities. He instinctively tried to reach for himself and then realized his hands were tied. Frustrated, he yanked on the ties. "Touch me," he begged.

Iason complied, stroking him gently but firmly, as he continued to pleasure him with his mouth. Then he began stroking faster, taking him mercilessly toward his peak.

"Holy fucking Jupiter," Riki breathed, his eyes rolling back in ecstasy. "Oh, fuck yes. Yes!" He moaned, and then cried out as he ejaculated, his essence spraying across his abdomen and chest, and dripping onto the bed below.

Repositioning his pet down on the bed, Iason lay on top of him for a few moments, allowing him time to fully enjoy his completion. Then, with shaking fingers, he found his entry, sinking into his prostrate pet, and then taking him, hard. Riki was intoxicatingly tight, as usual, so small compared Iason's massive size. No one else in the world felt this good, or so it seemed to the Blondie. Grabbing onto Riki's shoulders, Iason thrust as hard as he could, trying to get a little deeper, a bit further inside his beloved pet. He closed his eyes, overcome with pleasure. Riki felt so good...he was hot, and wet, and tight, and...

Iason was coming, and coming hard, his moans almost startling his pet, who had never heard his Blondie master make such sounds before.

"Oh, Riki," Iason whispered, collapsing onto him, then nuzzling against his cheek. "My pet."

After a few moments Riki began laughing softly. "You were in a kinky mood tonight, Iason. Tying me up and all. And," Riki smiled, "asking me if I wanted to be fucked."

Smiling, Iason got up and untied his pet.

"You were fucking awesome. I love it when you...when you lick me like that."

"I know you do, pet."

"The spanking was a little mean. I didn't even do anything."

"I already told you, I don't need a reason to spank you." Iason held out one of the ties, snapping in taut. "And I'll tie you up and spank you any time I like."

"You sadistic fuck."

Iason leaned close to Riki, smiling. "You like it. It's too late to pretend otherwise."

Riki gazed up at the beautiful Blondie, whose hair fell in golden trails across his body, his face so perfect, his eyes a stunning, sensual blue, and he realized at that moment, that despite all his efforts to resist such an outcome, he was falling in love with Iason, this Blondie who was master of his body, and now, his heart. "Kiss me," he whispered.

The Blondie complied, leaning down to impart a gentle kiss, one that spoke volumes as to the intimacy they had just shared, and the spaces that were closing between them. Riki pulled Iason down to him and they lay together, holding and caressing one another, and drinking one another in long, passionate kisses, the kind that are shared only by lovers.

Katze and Daryl were still on the balcony when the sounds of Iason and Riki's lovemaking first interrupted their conversation.

"Are they always like that?" Katze asked, shaking his head.

Daryl nodded. "You wouldn't believe it sometimes."

"I guess they're sexually compatible."

"It's more than that. I think," Daryl lowered his voice a little, "they love each other."

"Then the rumors are true." Katze turned his head, as though listening. "Was that Riki?"

"I think so."

"What the fuck is Iason doing to him?"

Daryl giggled. "You should have seen them last night."

"Oh yeah?" Katze leaned closer. "Details, Daryl."

"Well first, Raoul and Riki got into a fight. And then--"

"Whoa! Back up! Raoul was over here?"

"Yes. I think he and Iason were having some sort of lover's spat."

"What? Are they on again?"

"I'm not exactly sure. But I got the impression Raoul might have taken him by force."

Katze nodded, lighting up another smoke. "I'd believe that. Wouldn't be the first time. Raoul was a mean fucker when it came to Iason."

"So Raoul came over, I guess to apologize, and I think he was ticked off because it was obvious Iason and Riki were in bed together. Anyway, he comes onto Iason, and all of a sudden Riki comes in, kicks him in the stomach, and starts pounding him with his fists. Then Raoul punches him across the face, and Iason calls security and pulls a laser on Raoul."

“Holy shit!”

“Raoul gets escorted out. And then Iason finds out Riki is jealous because of Raoul. So after that...Riki asks Iason to show him...” Daryl hesitated.

“Show him...what?”

“Exactly how best to pleasure him,” he finished.

Katze took a deep drag. “And did he?”

“Yes.”

He leaned closer to Daryl. “And did you watch?”

“Maybe,” Daryl said, smiling.

“You pervert,” Katze grinned. “So tell me, what does Iason like?”

“He likes...he likes to be kissed along his throat.”

“Show me.”

“Huh?” Daryl blinked, uncertain of his meaning.

Katze pointed to his throat. “Do it to me.”

Daryl fell silent, staring at him blankly.

“What. Are you afraid?” Katze smiled in a comforting way. “I don't bite...at least not hard.”

Tentatively, Daryl moved forward, reaching up to kiss his exposed throat, letting his tongue flick gently over the skin. He felt Katze's arms around him as he continued to explore, encouraged when Katze let his head fall back.

“I can see why Iason likes this,” Katze whispered. Still with his arms around Daryl, he pulled him a little closer. “Want me to show you?”

“Yes please.” Daryl closed his eyes as Katze bent down and began kissing and gently biting his neck, then dragging his tongue in little swirls up to his ear, and sucking on his lobe. Shivering, Daryl opened his eyes, looking at Katze with wonder. “That felt really good.”

“I know something else that feels good.” Katze tossed his smoke aside, took hold of Daryl's chin, then bent down and kissed him, exploring him gently with his tongue. They kissed for a long

time, both of them marveling over the pleasure it gave them. "I've really missed that," he said, finally. "Haven't you?"

"That...was my first kiss." A little hesitantly, Daryl looked up into Katze's eyes.

Katze was startled. "Your first...you mean--"

"Yes. I was still a virgin."

"That should be a fucking crime," Katze said, shaking his head. "I'm sorry, Daryl." Then he leaned down, cradling Daryl's face between his hands and kissing him again, this time even more gently.

"The only sexual experience I've really had...is with Riki," Daryl confessed.

"With...Riki?"

He nodded. "Sometimes Iason makes me...do things to him."

"That pervert," Katze said, with a laugh.

"Katze? Have you ever...since--"

"No."

"If you want to...maybe we could just...lie together. We don't have to do anything."

Katze smiled. "If I want to? I definitely want to." He hooked a finger into Daryl's front pants pocket. "So...lead the way."

They went back into the penthouse, and as they passed Iason's bedroom, Katze put his arms around Daryl from behind. "Wait," he whispered. They could hear Riki's moans, their intensity betraying his imminent release, and then Katze squeezed Daryl tightly when Riki finally came, his cries sending shudders through them both. They continued on to Daryl's room, but as soon as they were inside, Katze saw that Daryl was crying.

"Hey," he whispered. "What's this?"

"You know what it is."

Katze gathered Daryl in his arms. "Come on now. You can't torment yourself like this. The things in life you can't do anything about, you just gotta let them go. And you can still feel pleasure. I'll show you."

"You will?"

“Yes. Right now.” Katze bent down and kissed him again, running his hands slowly down his back, then moving under his shirt to touch his bare skin.

Daryl gasped at the warm touch of his hands on his back, wanting more, and wanting to touch Katze. He slid his hands up his chest, infatuated by his firm muscles.

“Take off your shirt,” Katze whispered.

Hesitating, Daryl looked down, ashamed. “I have...scars.”

Katze smiled, pointing to his face. “So do I. Now take off your shirt.”

Daryl obeyed, and then Katze did likewise, and for a long time they just stood together thus, kissing and exploring one another. Daryl felt like he couldn't get enough of Katze, running his hands up and down his beautifully sculpted upper body. “You're like a god,” he said softly.

Katze laughed. “Yeah that's me. I'm a total god.” He ran his hands down Daryl's chest, sliding them across his abdomen to his waist. “You're beautiful, too.” He tugged suggestively on his pants. “I want to see all of you.”

“No!” Daryl pushed away. “I'm not ready. I can't!”

Katze gathered him up in his arms again. “Hey. It's okay. We don't have to, if you don't want to. But you don't have anything to be ashamed of around me, right? You're going to look normal to me.”

Daryl nodded, eyes averted.

“Let's just lay down.” Katze got on the bed, holding out his hand to Daryl, who lay down next to him, trembling. “Don't be scared, love.” Katze pulled him close, stroking his hair.

Having never been addressed as “love” by anyone, Daryl felt, at that moment, the happiest he had ever felt in his life. And that night he learned, from Katze's loving caresses and kisses and gentle embrace, that intimacy, and love, are free for anyone who dares to claim them, that true intimacy comes not just from sexual prowess or the possession of a functioning organ, but from bridging the spaces between two people--all the torments, fears, and secret

shame that keep people apart--and that, because he could love in this way, he was still a man after all.

Riki's Submission

Riki stared at the gold-plated collar and chain set in disbelief. On front of the collar and on both handcuffs, engraved prominently in bold relief, were the initials IM--Iason Mink.

"I'm not wearing them," he said.

"Riki, Master Iason says you are to be ready by 1:00. You really don't have a choice--you have to wear them."

"I said I'm not fucking wearing them!" Riki shouted. There was no way. No fucking way under heaven or hell he would be carted around like a piece of property, branded as the toy of Iason Mink.

Daryl was beside himself with anxiety. "If you don't put them on, you know what's going to happen. This Exhibit--this is a big deal. All the elite go, and if you're not ready, if you make Master Iason miss the opening ceremony--"

"Master Iason can go fuck himself, and all the fucking Blondie elite, too! This is bullshit! I'll not be put in chains like some stinking animal!"

"You should be proud to be Sir Iason's pet," Daryl said softly. "He's the most respected Blondie in all of Tanagura--no, in the entire sector. Have you any idea how many pets would give anything to be in your place?"

Riki scowled. "That's because they're all mindless trash who don't know what the fuck they want."

"Riki, please. It's getting late. You know how he can be...when he's angry. He'll force you. You know he will. He'll beat you until you submit to him."

Now Riki buried his face in his hands. "I can't. I just can't, Daryl. You don't understand."

"No, I don't, because we both know you're going to the Exhibit whether you want to or not. Master Iason always has his way. You know that! And if he has to put those chains on you while you're kicking and screaming, he will. So why put yourself through that? Do you really want another beating? I'm warning you--when he's really angry, I mean truly angry, he has a merciless arm. I don't know if you've ever really seen it--you might think you have, but I've watched him, and he holds back with you. You don't want to feel his fury unrestrained. You don't, Riki."

Now the dark-haired mongrel fell silent, letting his hands drop to his sides.

"Hold out your arm," Daryl said, softly.

Riki looked at the open cuff in Daryl's hands and shook his head.

Daryl sighed with exasperation. "He'll be here any moment. Please, Riki. Please!" Then, when Riki made no reply, he let his arms drop to his sides, the chains clanking loudly on the floor. "He's going to be furious."

As if on cue, the door hummed open and in walked their Blondie master, who, taking in the scene, stopped in his tracks. "Daryl," he said sharply. "I told you to have him ready by 1:00."

"Don't blame it on him," Riki said. "I'm not going. Not...wearing those."

An inexplicable look swept across the Blondie's face and for a moment he was silent. "Pet. You will put those chains on, and you will put them on now." Iason's voice was harsh, betraying his impatience.

Riki glared back at him, putting his hands on his hips. "There's no fucking way, Iason, you're getting me to wear those."

Striding towards Riki, Iason reached out and grabbed him by the hair, pulling his head back and whipping off his glove with his teeth. "You dare defy me, Riki," he whispered, then struck him,

hard, across the face. The mongrel stared back at him obstinately and Iason struck him again. "Obey me, pet!"

"I'm not your fucking pet." Riki's voice, almost inaudible, carried a message that was ill-received by the already enraged Blondie, who released him as ring-induced pain shot through the mongrel, bringing him to his knees in agony.

"You most certainly are my pet," Iason hissed. "I'll drive that fact into your very marrow." He turned sharply on his heels and went to the bar, where he opened a rarely used cabinet and withdrew what appeared to be a long rod, holding it up to show Riki. "This is a taming stick, pet. You're about to be tamed."

In a few short steps, Iason was at Riki's side, lifting him up and pushing his face up against the wall, pinning his hands over his head with one hand. Yanking down the mongrel's pants to reveal his bare flesh, the Blondie proceeded to strike him mercilessly, furiously, at the same tormenting him with the punishing constriction and pain of the pet ring. The taming stick had no fancy technology, no protective buffering system, no variable settings--it was just old-fashioned, brutal punishment intended to be wielded without restraint, saved for the most rebellious, disobedient pets--typically used much earlier in the taming process. But for Riki, two years under the management of his Blondie master had failed to curb his recurring disobedience, and Iason—who considered the taming stick somewhat barbaric--was completely fed up with his pet's obstinacy and defiance.

Daryl had backed away, holding his hands up to his ears, unable to listen to the sound of Riki's utter anguish. He was terrified of Iason, who almost seemed to have an aura around him, so intense was his fury, his arm whipping back and striking relentlessly, his jaw set so angrily, his robe swirling with the rhythmic movement of his body. He knew his Blondie master would be angry, but that didn't change the terror he felt when witnessing it, nor lessen his pity for the dark-haired mongrel, who, by now, fully regretted his disobedience.

When at length the punishment stopped, Riki slid to the floor, curling into a ball as he sobbed incessantly.

“Who do you belong to, Riki?” Iason asked, quietly.

Through broken sobs, Riki finally answered, “I belong...to you...Iason.”

“Clean him up,” Iason said, turning to Daryl. “Then get those chains on him. I've got to change.” Punishing Riki had made him break out into a sweat, and now he had to step into the shower to make himself presentable again for the Exhibit. He deeply resented this delay; now it was quite certain they would miss the opening ceremony. His anger with his pet had still not quite abated, although once he was clean and dry again, he began to feel a little cooler.

He returned to the living quarters to find Riki finally ready; his arms were chained together with cuffs, and a long chain hung from his collar, attached to a cuff which Iason slipped onto his left wrist, snapping it shut almost angrily. “Daryl. Bring me the taming stick and the belt.”

Daryl obeyed, retrieving the belt and sheath from the bar cabinet. Iason fastened the belt around his waist and slid the stick into its sheath. Riki eyed it apprehensively but said nothing.

“Listen to me, Riki. If you misbehave in any way, I'll whip you in the presence of everyone there. Is that understood?”

His pet nodded, his spirit now entirely broken.

“I mean it. There will be many important people there--including Raoul, by the way. We'll be going to his exhibit.”

Riki's confusion was evident in his expression. He blinked, shaking his head slightly. “His...exhibit?”

“Yes, pet. Raoul happens to be one of the greatest artists in Tanagura--some even say of our age. I guess there's no reason why you should have known that. But he's highly respected--don't even think of starting a scene with him there. It doesn't matter what's happened before. This is his arena. Do you hear me?”

“Yes.”

“Yes, what?”

“Yes, Iason.”

“Try again.”

Riki sighed, defeated. “Yes...Master Iason.”

“In public, you will only address me as Master Iason. Is that quite clear?”

Riki nodded, ruminating on this new information and trying to reconcile the puzzling contradiction of Raoul, the monster whom he abhorred, with Raoul, the great artist who everyone respected. He shot a few glances at Iason and could tell he was still annoyed.

Riding with him on the way to the Emporium was torture--he hated when Iason was angry with him-- but he had never been quite like this. The Blondie continued to be harsh with him, scolding his every move, treating him as though he had just arrived in Eos and none of the two years of intimacy between them had even taken place.

“Stop sulking,” the Blondie said, sharply. “We're almost there.”

Wanting to snap back a reply but knowing full well the dire consequences of such folly, Riki sunk down in his seat, dreading the next few hours.

“Did you hear me?” Iason demanded. “Wipe that look off your face.”

Riki looked out the window to avoid the Blondie's scrutiny. Iason put the vehicle in park with an angry thrust, reaching out to grab his chin, turning his face back to him. “You're not listening to me.”

Then, suddenly, Iason entered the codes to darken the windows and recline the seat, which moved back and extended until they were on a flat surface. Riki looked at him in alarm, fearing more discipline under the taming stick. But when he saw Iason unfastening his trouser flap, he realized what the Blondie had in mind.

The look in his eyes was unfamiliar--there was lust, certainly, but more than that, there was still anger, and something else Riki couldn't quite discern. And then Iason was coming at him, flipping him onto his stomach with his chained hands above his head. He

cringed when Iason lowered his pants with a furious yank. He felt his Blondie master press against him briefly and then, before he even had a chance to comprehend that Iason was taking him completely unprepared, the Blondie covered his mouth with his gloved hand to mask his cries and plunged fully into him.

His master then took him with punishing force, nothing short of complete rape. "You most certainly are my pet," he whispered in his ear fiercely, "my fucking pet, as you put it--and I'll fuck you any time I want, any way I want. You'll obey me, Riki. I'll make you obey me. Do you hear me? Don't you ever defy me like that again--ever! When I tell you to do something, you'll do it. No argument, no tantrums--how does this feel? Would you like me to take you like this every day? Not what you had in mind, I think? When you're in the Exhibit and you feel my essence still in you, stinging you, gravity pulling the wetness down between your legs, you'll think about how I took you like this, and how I'll do it in a heartbeat--even harder than this--if you ever dare defy me again."

Riki was shaking with fear. The pain of Iason's forced entry was worsened by the excruciating tenderness of his punished flesh--but more than this, he felt paralyzed by his Blondie master's fury.

"You have no idea what I could do to you, Riki, if you push me. Don't test me--I guarantee you won't like it. You think you won't submit, but I'll make you submit, pet, I'll do whatever it takes--spank you, whip you, lock you up, chain you, bind you, rape you with my taming stick--until you bend to my will. I'll break you, Riki. Until you're on your knees, begging for mercy, and even then I won't stop, until you fully regret your disobedience."

That Iason had worked himself into such an extreme emotional state was unusual--he typically was able to keep his composure, no matter what the circumstance. But he was still furious with Riki, and now he was extremely aroused, thoroughly enjoying taking his pet--so irresistibly submissive in chains--by force, delighting in holding him down and covering his mouth to mask his cries, savoring his pet's trembling beneath him as he whispered his threats into his ear. Riki felt incredibly tight--almost unbearably so--

-and the stimulation of his unprepared, unloosened embrace was enhanced by the violence of the acquisition, pushing the Blondie to new heights of sexual stimulation within a matter of minutes.

Riki had never felt so afraid of Iason before. Something about him was different; the brutal penetration, and his master's whispered threats, actually terrified him more than his earlier punishment. Iason's words were alarming and at the same time, strangely hypnotic, resonating in a place deep within where a part of him was almost enchanted with the dominating force of his Blondie master. His commands triggered an instinctive reaction to fully submit to whatever Iason desired; he wanted to submit, longed to please Iason, and he didn't even know why. He found this side of Iason disconcertingly sexual, although at the moment he was too frightened to physically respond. The thick emotion in his voice, his fury, the way he took him so violently, all these things were puzzlingly erotic and intoxicating in some inexplicable way. But at the same time, he felt distanced from this new side of Iason Mink, as though he was in the presence of a new Blondie master who he didn't really know.

The Blondie's breathing increased and by his physical cues Riki knew he was on the verge of ejaculation, and then he was there--Iason's release announced by a series of gasps and the shaking of his body against his frightened pet.

Iason rolled off him, returning the seat to its upright position. He tossed a cloth to his pet. "Clean up," he ordered.

Riki stared at the cloth where it landed, choking back tears. "Iason, please. Can't you forgive me now? You're really...scaring me. I'm sorry I disobeyed you. I know that was stupid. But I can't stand for you to be this way. You won't even look at me. It's like last night...and all those nights...didn't even happen. What we shared. I can't fucking stand the thought that you...don't...care for me anymore. What are you going to do, sell me off now?"

With these words, the Blondie turned and looked at his pet, his expression softening as his anger melted away, and in that instant Riki knew that his master had forgiven him.

“Riki,” he sighed. “Come here, pet.”

Riki scooted closer to the Blondie, who put his arms around him, then with one hand began stroking his cheek. “You'll always be my pet--I've told you this, many times. I'll never sell you. Just because I have to punish you, doesn't mean I don't care for you.” He kissed him softly on the lips, smiling. “So. Are you going to be obedient now, my pet?”

The mongrel nodded, relieved to see the Blondie master he recognized again.

“Good boy. Let's get going, we're late.”

Raoul's Vindication

Iason and Riki arrived at the Emporium nearly an hour after the opening ceremony was scheduled to begin. As they approached the building, Riki suddenly felt a little overwhelmed, having never seen a structure quite like the one that loomed before them. It was an architectural wonder—a massive, arena-like structure with a double row of arched windows extending its entire circumference and an entrance guarded by two massive statues—Ios and Erphanes, the legendary warrior brothers who chose to die rather than renounce their love when confronted by the jealous military commander Jun Tahn. The inscription above the entrance read “In Art, Nothing Is Forbidden.”

He had never seen a building that approached the Emporium in beauty or sheer magnitude, and now the orphan mongrel from the slums felt very much out of place, intimidated by this first step into the world of the Blondie elite. He glanced anxiously ahead at Iason, who seemed to sense his uneasiness, though he could not see his face.

“Don’t worry, pet. Nothing is expected of you except obedience. Just watch and listen, and try to enjoy yourself.”

Riki sighed, following his Blondie master a few steps behind. The chain from his collar was still fastened to Iason’s wrist cuff, requiring him to keep pace with the Blondie’s swift stride.

Despite their late arrival, as soon as they made their entrance it became evident that the opening ceremony had been specifically delayed for Iason. Riki then became aware, perhaps for the first

time, of exactly what status his Blondie master enjoyed among the Blondie elite and why Iason didn't want to miss the opening.

It was, from the mongrel's view, one big ass-kissing party for Iason Mink. Everyone approached him obsequiously, courting his attention, flattering him openly, and he was greeted ubiquitously with admiration and respect. For all Iason's fury over being delayed, it was now quite apparent to Riki that the ceremony would not have taken place—no one would have even dreamed of it—until Jupiter's beloved golden boy arrived.

Riki had anticipated that, as Iason's pet, he would be under intense scrutiny, but he could not have imagined how that would feel when countless eyes explored his body openly, as though trying to determine what he looked like beneath his clothes. This was his first showing in public among the Blondie elites who had heard rumors of the mongrel pet for nearly two years but had never actually seen him. The other pets were equally curious and surprised by his dark hair and eyes, wondering why Iason had chosen a mongrel rather than an A-class pet. Everyone there had by that time heard the rumor that Iason engaged sexually with his pet, something that simply wasn't done, and Iason's predilection in this regard was the one thing that threatened to tarnish his otherwise perfect reputation.

Although initially Riki felt uncomfortable and exposed by all the attention he garnered, eventually he became accustomed to it. Some of the initial interest in him was starting to expire, leaving him free to engage in his own voyeuristic enterprises, and he found, in a hall full of hundreds of Blondies, that he was among the most beautiful, sexually vital men he had ever seen in his life. Each Blondie was gorgeous in his own way, all of them sharing the same gloriously long, silky blonde hair, though in many different shades. Yet even as Riki felt an instinctive stirring of his loins among so much incontrovertible virility, he was certain of one thing—Iason was the most breathtaking of them all.

Iason was like a god among them, moving from individual to individual with grace and poise that Riki had never witnessed in his

Blondie master before, his conversation witty and yet unrehearsed, his smile enchanting, his eyes flirtatious—blinking in an irresistible, undeniably seductive way—his soft laugh hypnotic, his voice low and smooth like that of a lover on the first night of conquest. And Iason surprised him—he seemed to speak a multitude of languages, shifting from one tongue to another with disconcerting ease as he greeted Blondies from throughout the sector.

In fact, the mongrel was quite overwhelmed by this new face of his Blondie master, suddenly understanding what Daryl had been trying to tell him since he had first arrived in Tanagura. To be the pet of Iason Mink was an exceptional thing—and Riki found that, for the first time, he was proud of his status as his pet. The chains that he had endured so much punishment to avoid wearing now almost seemed comforting to him, visible proof of his special connection to Tanagura's most highly respected Blondie.

Although Iason had not spoken to him since their arrival, Riki felt that his Blondie master was aware of him; he sometimes seemed to move deliberately close to him, so close that the mongrel was tormented by the intoxicating smell of his hair, and every now and then he would pull gently on the chain between them, as though urging him even closer. And because he knew Iason so well, he felt the Blondie was communicating with him through these seemingly insignificant actions. At one point he pulled Riki close and let his hand rest for a moment low on his back, sending his heart racing. And then he finally leaned down, whispering in his ear, "You're being very good, pet."

The "opening ceremony" lasted an absolute eternity, from the dark-haired mongrel's perspective— the Blondies all seeming to share Iason's penchant for fine wine, flattery, and aristocratic banter. Just as Riki was beginning to feel unbearably bored, the "opening" was announced in a few brief words, and everyone began moving into the corridors that led to the halls of the exhibits. This seemed to signal an end to the light-hearted socialization, the elite now approaching the exhibits as though entering the tomb of an ancient king—solemnly and quietly, but for the eerie clanking and

jingling of countless pet chains. The Blondies dispersed throughout the exhibit halls, conversation now in hushed tones.

Iason was now apparently “disengaged” from his social responsibilities, and began talking with Riki in a low voice.

“Remember why we’ve come here, Riki. Take a look around and tell me what you like.”

Riki sighed, a little loudly, to suggest his disinterest in such a project, yet found that he was actually drawn to the exhibits, not a little flattered that his Blondie master wanted his opinion. No one had ever asked for his opinion before, had ever wanted to know how he responded intellectually and viscerally to a work of art, and the orphan from the slums was, deep within, excited to have his perspective so valued. He passed the first few exhibits with little interest, and then suddenly stopped in front of one that appeared to be an ancient mural of some kind, its edges chipped and eroded, and the paint faded and peeling. It depicted a child reaching down innocently to pet a snarling animal.

“This is...interesting,” he said.

“Actually, this is from the archeological dig at Minas Qentu. Technically it’s an artifact, or maybe you could call it buried art,” Iason said with a smile. “It should really be in a museum somewhere; it’s quite splendid. Do you like it?”

Riki nodded.

The Blondie entered his code on the panel next to the exhibit, the purchase screen now reading: Sold: Iason Mink.

Next Riki pointed out a massive but simple clay pot with a round shape he found appealing, and then several life-size sculptures of ancient warriors, some illuminated manuscripts from the Lost Age, a dragon-head prow and painted shields from the barbarian culture of Urasia, and an intricately engraved ivory spell box recovered from the tomb of King Chunamenkhan; Iason purchased all of these as well.

“You seem to be drawn to ancient civilizations,” the Blondie commented, rather fascinated with his pet’s choices. “I’m beginning to understand what you like. What do you think of this one, Riki?”

Riki stared at the abstract painting for a moment, hesitant.

“What is it?” Iason whispered, with a smile.

“Do you want my honest opinion?”

“Most definitely.”

“This isn’t really art,” he answered.

Laughing softly, the Blondie leaned close to him. “I quite agree with you, but let’s keep quiet about it—that’s the artist over there by the window.”

Then, the tone of his voice changed. “I think we’re coming to Raoul’s exhibit next,” he said, looking at the Exhibit map. “This is just a reminder to be on your best behavior, Riki.”

The dark-haired mongrel nodded, steeling himself for an encounter with his nemesis. But nothing could have prepared him for what happened next.

As they entered the exhibit, his eyes were immediately drawn to the huge painting that was prominently displayed on the main wall. He gasped, unable to believe what he was seeing.

The painting was called Ios and Erphanes, and it depicted the final moments of the ill-fated lovers, who chose to die together rather than renounce their love. In the legend, the brothers made love on the beach as the tides came in, then Erphanes took poison into his mouth and shared it with Ios in a last kiss. Because of the intensity of their love at the moment of their death, they were transformed into the twin moons that then forever ruled the tides.

What was shocking about it, from Riki’s perspective, was that it was basically a nude rendering of Iason and Raoul.

Raoul had captured Iason exactly, the hollows of his muscles, his languid sensuality, his perfectly sculpted body and angelically beautiful face. Ios lay on the beach, his body glistening wet as the tide rolled against him, looking as though he had just climaxed—eyes closed, lips slightly parted—a look Riki had seen many times. Erphanes was on his side, propped up on one arm, looking down intently at his lover, the vial of poison clenched in his hand. It was, perhaps, the most beautiful thing the dark-haired mongrel had ever seen in his life—and impossible that it had been painted by Raoul.



When Iason saw the painting, he stopped in his tracks, then sighed, annoyed. The last thing he wanted was to have his naked body paraded before all of Tanagura. Already the painting had attracted considerable attention, though at the extraordinary price of two million credits, no one had yet purchased it.

Raoul approached him with a slight smile. "So. What do you think?"

"You could have asked my permission, Raoul," Iason whispered, somewhat exasperated.

"You...don't like it?"

"As a piece of art, it's stunning—brilliant—as your work always is, Raoul. You know exactly what my problem with it is. Now I'll have to purchase this, just to keep it out of the wrong hands."

Riki, hearing this, almost smiled. So it was a different story when his Blondie master had his sexuality publicly exposed.

Now Raoul leaned close to Iason. "You don't have to purchase it. I'll give it to you," he said, "in exchange for one night in your bed."

Iason fell silent, considering. He wanted the painting—mostly because he felt uncomfortable about it, a feeling he was quite unaccustomed to—but also, he had to concede, it was indisputably a masterpiece. Even at the exorbitant price of two million credits, he knew someone would purchase it before the day was over. One night. It would not be unpleasant...and perhaps, it would even restore something that had broken down between them—not that he intended to become Raoul's lover again.

Riki heard the proposition with disbelief, yet fully expecting Iason to immediately decline. When his Blondie master seemed to be considering the offer, he became increasingly agitated. Surely Iason wasn't going to accept. A dark, irrepressible jealousy began to rise from deep within, his heart beginning to pound as he waited for Iason's answer.

"One night," Iason agreed. Raoul smiled, thrilled beyond words, already feeling aroused just knowing he would finally have his way

with his old pairing partner. He couldn't resist glancing triumphantly at Riki, who had watched the exchange with horror.

Riki felt as though he'd been physically hit. Despite all of Iason's warnings and threats and his brutal punishment only hours before, he was unable to contain his raging jealousy.

"No! Iason, no! You can't!" His voice echoed through the hushed exhibit, drawing everyone's attention.

Iason whipped around. "Silence, Riki!"

"Not with him. Iason! Not with that fucking perverted bastard!" Riki gestured at Raoul with obvious hatred.

Shocked gasps followed this plea, from Blondies and pets alike. That the mongrel pet addressed his Blondie master so familiarly was inappropriate in and of itself—but his demanding tone was inexcusable, and then, to insult a Blondie—particularly a great artist like Raoul—was unthinkable. Everyone watched to see how Iason would handle the situation.

"Your pet needs taming, Iason," Raoul said, quietly, hands crossed on his chest.

To those watching, it was perhaps the understatement of the year.

Iason sighed and pulled the taming stick from its sheath, turning to Raoul. "What will satisfy you?"

"Fifteen strikes on exposed flesh."

Fifteen strikes. And exposed. A bit harsh—and yet Iason knew it was completely within the realm of acceptable punishment given his pet's transgression in a public place—at the Tanagura Art Exhibit no less. And not to honor an offended party's decision for punishment...it wasn't even an option. But Iason knew that it would be torture for Riki, given the discipline he had already endured just hours before. His heart went out to his unruly pet, who was about to experience nothing short of true agony and who, Iason knew, would be devastated by the humiliation of being exposed and tamed in public. He had warned Riki so many times...why hadn't he listened? The Blondie could not save him from his punishment—his

reputation was at stake. He had no choice but to correct his pet for his inconceivable disobedience.

“Pet!” he said harshly. “For your disobedience in addressing a Blondie so disrespectfully, you’ll take fifteen strikes.” Grabbing hold of Riki’s arm, he yanked down his pants to his knees, his already punished backside now revealed for all to see, eliciting a few gasps of surprise and—from the watching pets—horror. Angry welts covered the mongrel’s buttocks and thighs, a sight that was extraordinarily pleasing to Raoul, who was taking in the scene with utter delight, unable to suppress an arrogantly satisfied smile.

Riki, now realizing his stupidity, yet still angry and jealous over Iason’s arrangement with Raoul, added mortification to his repertoire of unhappy emotions when he was exposed in front of a gathering crowd of onlookers. His humiliation was short-lived; when the first strike hit his thighs, he was overcome with agonizing pain, crying out in a voice so piercing that many of the pets there looked away, unable to watch his torment.

“One.” Raoul’s voice penetrated through his consciousness, adding to his agony. That Raoul was counting the strikes as Iason administered them was like pouring vinegar on his wounds.

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Four.”

The pets watched Iason wield the taming stick in absolute horror, the Blondies with admiration; his arm whipped back with firm purpose, striking Riki with unfettered force, the mongrel’s anguished cries validating the authenticity of his discipline.

“Five.”

“Six.”

“Seven.”

“Eight.”

Iason wanted desperately to end the punishment and gather his pet into his arms, when strike after strike elicited heart-wrenching cries from his beloved Riki.

“Nine.”

“Ten.”

“Eleven.”

It seemed as though fifteen strikes was an eternity. Out of pity, Iason began aiming now lower down on his thighs where his pet was less tender.

“Twelve.”

“Thirteen.”

“Fourteen.”

Riki was beyond agony; he was now transported to a place so terrible, his mind was darkening and he felt ready to pass out.

“Fifteen.”

The final strike having been delivered, Iason released his hold in Riki, sliding the taming stick back into his sheath firmly. His punishment of Riki was probably the best thing he could have done to restore—at least temporarily—his reputation when it came to his mongrel pet. He had not hesitated to discipline his unruly charge, thus curbing many of the rumors that had been circulating regarding his special treatment of the mongrel. At least in the minds of those watching, Iason had responded exactly as he should have, perhaps even more severely than many masters would. The fact that he carried a taming stick, and had obviously used it earlier that day, appeased the doubts of some regarding the relationship between Iason and his pet. Some Blondies there contemplated resurrecting the practice of carrying taming sticks, following Iason’s example—a rather unnecessary measure given docile obedience of most pets.

When at last the punishment ceased and Iason released him, Riki fell to his knees, hands on the floor, shaking. He was unable to even pull up his trousers and did not even notice when Iason crouched down beside him and helped him with this. He became aware of his master’s voice, but could not understand what he said. Slowly, his senses started to return to him and he realized that Iason was whispering in his ear.

“Get up now, pet. It’s over.”

“Help me,” he whispered. “I can’t....”

“Open your mouth,” he said softly, “try to swallow this.” Out of compassion for his pet, Iason was slipping him an Opiate-6, having a supply that he always carried with him because of his recurring headaches. Riki choked the pill down, vaguely wondering what it was, but feeling too disoriented to ask. Already his own body’s opiates were starting to kick in and his pain was starting to dissipate, although as he began to comprehend where he was and what had just occurred, the humiliation of it hit him full force.

“Can we go home?” he pleaded.

“No, pet. No one is watching you now. Soon you’ll be feeling much better, I promise.”

With his master’s help, the mongrel stood up. Then he suddenly buried his face in Iason’s chest, clinging to him, a comfort that the Blondie allowed him, stroking his hair for a few minutes.

Raoul was beside himself with pure joy over what had just transpired—the punishment of Riki in such a deliciously brutal way, on top of Iason’s promise to give him one night of pleasure. His heart was racing and he was already fantasizing about what he would do. Everything had worked out exactly as he had planned and he felt vindicated beyond his wildest dreams. Not only was he desperate to satisfy all his long-harbored sexual longings when it came to Iason, but he now knew that doing so would infuriate the mongrel he hated so much. He watched Riki’s suffering and obvious difficulty in getting back on his feet with dark satisfaction, although he felt a little annoyed when Iason began comforting his pet. Still, that couldn’t spoil his utter triumph. He’d won.

When Iason finally turned to meet his gaze, he managed to wipe the smile off his face. “So...tonight?” he asked, hopefully.

“Not tonight,” Iason answered. He fully intended to pleasure Riki in whatever way he could to make up for what had turned out to be an extraordinarily bad day for his beloved pet. “Tomorrow.”

Raoul nodded, smiling. “I’ll come by at 8:00.”

Riki, hearing this exchange, gave a little sob, and the Blondie smiled, thrilled with his pet’s transparent jealousy, and his now truly submissive way of showing it. But, not wanting Riki to suffer

any more, he moved away from Raoul's exhibit. With a smile of victory, Raoul punched his own codes for the sale of Ios and Erphanes, the purchase screen now reading: Sold. Iason Mink.

Mercifully, the dark-haired mongrel was starting to feel the effects of the A-class opiate derivative, his pain subsiding, and, in short order, the relief extending further into downright pleasure. He felt extraordinarily grateful for Iason's compassion in giving him what he now realized was a potent, kick-ass painkiller, though the opiate could not reach the pain in his heart. He looked up at the Blondie with a little smile.

"Feeling better?" Iason asked, then laughed softly at Riki's expression—his eyes glowing with pleasure and his mouth twisted in a lopsided smile.

"What did you give me?" he whispered.

The Blondie leaned down. "An Opiate-6," he said in a quiet voice.

"I love you forever for that."

Iason felt his heart race a little faster, though he knew his pet did not mean the words in the way he wished. Still, it was the closest Riki had ever come to expressing his affection, and the Blondie shuddered, delighted.

The rest of the afternoon passed without incident; they made quite a few more purchases and then finally returned home, both of them quiet during the ride back to Eos. Iason looked over and saw that Riki had fallen asleep from the powerful effect of the drug. He carried his pet inside, all the way from the parking garage to the penthouse on the top floor, the dark-haired mongrel completely limp in his arms.

Daryl immediately greeted him at the door, looking at Riki with alarm.

"He's only sleeping," Iason said, softly. He set his pet down on his bed and let him sleep until he finally woke up, well into the evening.

Riki opened his eyes and looked around, feeling disoriented, and wondering how he got on Iason's bed. The events of the day

slowly cleared the fog of his mind, and he began to relive the horrors of his double punishment, the rape, and Iason's arrangement with Raoul. Mercifully, the opiate Iason had given him was still in effect, and he felt no pain. He got up, and went out into the living quarters.

Iason was standing before the enormous window that offered a spectacular view of the Tanagura skyline at night. He turned, smiling. "So. You're awake now," he said softly. "Daryl has food ready for you; you must be hungry."

The mongrel nodded, feeling famished, but avoided looking directly at Iason, his feelings when it came to his Blondie master now a confusing mix of fear and anger.

"It's your favorite," Daryl said, bringing him a bowl of the steaming lamb stew he knew the mongrel loved.

"Thank you, Daryl," Riki said, in a low voice, almost afraid to speak loudly.

Daryl noted Riki's nervousness and hunched posture with a sharp stab of sorrow. The poor terrorized mongrel was becoming more and more like him.

Riki ate quickly, then slipped out onto the balcony for a smoke.

The approach of his master startled him, and he threw his smoke over the ledge as if fearing Iason would scold him for smoking, flinching as the Blondie drew near.

He began trembling when Iason reached out to touch him. "Don't be afraid, pet," he whispered, pulling him close. He could feel Riki's trembling and his heart ached for his frightened pet. Bending down, he tilted the mongrel's chin up and kissed him gently, lovingly, pulling him close against his body until he felt his pet relax and begin responding.

"I know this has been a hard day for you, pet," he said, softly. "But the sun has set and the day is gone; tonight I want to pleasure you. So I give myself up to you, Riki."

Hearing this, the mongrel's dark eyes widened. "You...give yourself up to me? You mean...like before?"

"Yes."

“I can do...whatever I want? Anything?”

“Anything. I am yours completely.”

Riki’s heart began to race. “You’ll be my pet tonight?”

Iason laughed. “Yes, I’ll be your pet.”

Intrigued, the mongrel began probing Iason further to test the authenticity of his offer. “So, what if I wanted to use the G-strap on you? You wouldn’t get pissed off?”

The Blondie smiled. “I submit fully to your every desire.”

Now beside himself with excitement, Riki began fantasizing about what he wanted to do, becoming aroused just thinking about it. He looked at Iason with a mischievous smile, then stepped back, crossing his arms on his chest.

“Pet! In the bedroom, now!” he commanded.

Iason obeyed, delighted with Riki’s role-playing.

“Undress and lie facedown on the bed,” he said, sternly. “Daryl!”

“Yes...Riki?” Daryl said, rushing and taking in the scene with a look of confusion.

“Bring me the G-strap.”

Daryl hesitated, glancing at Iason.

“Go ahead, Daryl,” the Blondie said, softly, and he rushed off to retrieve the device.

Riki opened a drawer and removed Iason’s silk ties, snapping one taut in front of Iason’s face, and then tying his wrists to the bedposts.

Daryl returned with the G-strap, grinning when he saw Iason tied to the bed. He couldn’t wait to find out from Riki later exactly what was going on.

Riki flipped his wrist almost angrily, activating the G-strap with an intimidating crack. “Pet. You’re going to be punished for no particular reason. Just because I fucking feel like it. And then I’m going to fuck you, or maybe I’ll come on your face. Or maybe both.”

Iason smiled at his pet’s speech, thoroughly enjoying the game thus far. When the punishment began, he felt a little less amused, but was determined to submit fully to whatever Riki wanted as he

had promised. The Blondie bore the discipline of the G-strap with typical stoicism, his face betraying no hint of pain, except the slight wrinkling between his eyebrows and the parting of his lips. Riki found, once he had the G-strap in his hands and Iason's prostrate body waiting for punishment, that all his anguish and anger was funneled into the force of his discipline. He really let Iason have it. He knew the Blondie felt it, even if he made no sound, and that fueled a deep insurgence of pleasure. He was furious with Iason for his "one night" arrangement with Raoul—which would probably end up being one night of fucking nonstop until daylight. He felt jealous, betrayed, hurt, angry, bewildered, and stupid. Most of all stupid, for falling in love with the Blondie, with someone who he would never be on the same footing with and who could agree to be fucked by the one man Riki hated most of all, without even giving a thought to his feelings.

There was no question that Iason was thoroughly strapped. A little surprised with the mongrel's enthusiasm, the Blondie quietly endured the pain of the punishment, marveling when he became increasingly aroused as the G-strap offered its supplementary magic. He became so aroused that he no longer even thought about the pain; all he wanted—desperately wanted—was relief. He needed to come. He really, really, needed to come. He began moaning, thrusting into the bed.

Riki noted Iason's movement and flipped off the G-strap. "Stop doing that. You can't come yet."

Iason gritted his teeth. "Riki. I need—."

"Hush! You'll come when I say you can come, and not a fucking moment before!"

The Blondie fell silent. He didn't want to spoil Riki's moment but he had an inkling he might spontaneously ejaculate without even trying. He tried to think of something non-arousing—the upcoming Alpha Zen trade convention. He needed to contact Xuri Bellicar regarding the menu for the annual meeting, the fish sounded excellent but he wasn't so sure about the side dishes, he didn't care much for heavy sauces, and what he really needed was to

press himself up against Riki's mouth and watch him lick the head just like that, and then thrust just a little bit into his mouth, yes—exactly like that—his essence spraying onto his hot wet tongue....

Riki had undressed and now was lifting Iason's hips. "Get on your knees...spread your legs a little more."

Iason obeyed and then gasped when he felt the mongrel's tongue flicking along his most sensitive region, exploring the entire area between his portal to his manhood, then thrusting enticingly into him, the hot wetness inside him unbearably erotic. He desperately wanted Riki to touch him and let him release his now painfully intense lust. He yanked on the ties, now a little irritated. "Riki," he gasped. "Could you...please...relieve me?"

The dark-haired mongrel stopped what he was doing and, answered, "Yes, pet," then flipped onto his back and slid between Iason's legs to position himself under him. Excited, the Blondie lowered his hips until he felt his rigid member bump up against Riki's mouth. With devastating skill, the mongrel now pleased the Blondie in exactly the way he knew he wanted it, swirling his tongue erotically along the head and sucking gently on the tip as Iason began small thrusts into his wet embrace.

Riki's hot mouth and tongue provided the fatal stimulation—Iason groaned, loudly, giving a final thrust as he burst into the mongrel's mouth, the exquisite release so intense that he cried out as if in pain.

Thrilled with Iason's vocalization and now acutely feeling the urgency of his own arousal, Riki repositioned himself behind the Blondie, pushing himself up against his portal in tantalizing little thrusts, each going a little further in, until finally he sunk into Iason with all his might, moaning from the incredible pleasure of his twitching grip and the utter loveliness of the fuck.

He loved fucking Iason. More than anyone else in his entire life...even Guy. And he felt the day's punishment and trials were all worth it for this one moment, this one delicious, wickedly sweet intimate moment with Iason. Gasping from the incredibly

stimulating squeezes of the Blondie's inner sanctum, he climaxed with an intensity that was too beautiful for words.

Afterwards, he untied Iason and they both lay together, quiet.

"Did I hurt you?" Riki asked, finally.

"A little," Iason conceded.

"Good." The mongrel smiled.

Iason laughed softly. "I see. So, you wanted to hurt me for punishing you. I suppose you feel vindicated."

"Not for punishing me. That's not why."

"No?"

"Don't you know?" Riki felt a little annoyed. "Because you're going to let that bastard fuck you tomorrow. Or have you forgotten why I got my ass caned in front of a billion gawking Blondies?"

Iason smiled, once again getting a little thrill from his pet's jealousy.

"There's nothing fucking funny about it. Dammit, Iason."

"I've told you. Raoul means nothing to me. This is just...a business arrangement."

Now Riki sat up, angry. "A business arrangement? Are you fucking out of your mind? He's not coming over here to talk about your fucking security grid. He's coming over here to fuck you in every perverted way possible. And you knew how I felt about him. You knew. Have you even thought about how I'll feel when I have to watch him take you into this room and then know he's fucking you right here on this bed, or maybe on the floor or against the wall and there's nothing I can do about it? I think you deliberately torment me."

"Does this mean," the Blondie said softly, "that you have feelings for me?"

The mongrel shot him a dark look, refusing to answer.

"Come here," Iason said, pulling him back down on the bed and holding him tight from behind. "You're the one I want to be with," he whispered in his ear. "You're the one I care about, pet."

Riki sighed, somewhat comforted by these words but still angry, and now realizing how much he was dreading what was coming tomorrow. He closed his eyes, trying to wish it away.

Riki's Night Out

The day after the Exhibit, Iason's purchases began arriving at the penthouse. The Blondie appeared to be in especially high spirits as he oversaw the placement of the priceless works of art throughout the dwelling. Iason had a special fondness for art and had always insisted on having the very best that credits could buy.

He had spent over two million at the Emporium and didn't regret a single credit. Thrilled with his mongrel's surprisingly sophisticated taste, he had purchased every item Riki had pointed out without hesitating, his own preferences completely consonant with his pet's, and his extensive experience in collecting assuring him that all of the objects were certain to increase in value. Iason's penchant for art acquisition was such that he had often thought of opening his own museum; for a few years he had toyed with approaching Jupiter about it—he would, of course, be forced to name the museum after her, to elicit her support and an increase in his credit portfolio.

Riki, in contrast to his Blondie master, was in a decidedly somber mood that day, spending most of his time out on the balcony, smoking and brooding. Eventually Iason came out of the penthouse, standing just outside the door that led onto the balcony, a glass of wine in hand.

“Riki. Come here.”

Sighing, the mongrel tossed his smoke over the edge and jumped down from the ledge, walking rather stiffly toward the Blondie with his hands sunk deep in his pockets. As he neared him,

Iason bent down and kissed him gently on the lips. “Don’t you want to see how the penthouse looks with all our new acquisitions?”

His pet shrugged, feigning disinterest.

Iason laughed softly. “I see. Quite the mongrel with no interest in refined things—Dark Baccalias excluded. You have surprisingly good taste for someone who pretends to abhor art,” he teased.

The dark-haired mongrel awarded him with a small glance and the slightest hint of a smile.

“Come, love. Let me show you.” Iason put his hand on Riki’s back, guiding him into the house, where his pet was pleasantly surprised with the effect of all his choices together in one setting—the painted Urasian shields lining the wall, the warrior statues throughout the great room, the immense dragon-head prow proudly displayed in one corner as though the ship was emerging from the wall.

Along the walls between hanging tapestries, the illuminated manuscripts and the ivory spell box were mounted in glass cases. The mural from Minas Qentu adorned the east wall between the ceiling-high windows, and pots, urns and other clay vessels were tastefully placed in various locations throughout the penthouse. In addition to Riki’s choices, the paintings Iason had selected now hung along the walls; the Blondie had a weakness for Vendal Dynasty art, with its rich colors, intricate detail and classic themes, and Riki found these selections appealed to him as well. He was actually quite enamored with the collection as a whole; there was something comforting and welcoming in it, as though, because many were pieces that resonated with him and that he had specifically chosen, the collection now reflected something of the mongrel himself.

Now he began to get a sense of exactly the extent of his transgression when he had destroyed Iason’s collection, how much he must have hurt his Blondie master with the loss of irreplaceable objects that he had hand-selected, works of art that appealed so strongly to him he had been willing to spend one million credits to attain them.

“What is it?” Iason asked softly, puzzling over Riki’s dark expression.

“Iason,” Riki began, hesitantly, “I wanted to ask you. Why didn’t you punish me when I destroyed your collection?”

The Blondie smiled. “So. You understand now.”

“I broke all those things...that you must have truly cherished. I’ve done lots of stuff that was hardly anything and you punished me without mercy, and then I do something like that, and you don’t do squat.”

Now Iason reached down, tipping the mongrel’s chin up to look into his eyes. “Broken objects are nothing when the one you treasure most is broken inside. I knew you did not, in your heart, know what you were doing, so I forgave you.” Then he smiled. “Although we could certainly arrange a delayed punishment session.”

“I’ll pass for now,” Riki said, dryly. He was so sore he could hardly move.

The Blondie leaned closer. “And for the record, the things you were punished for on other occasions were all perfectly egregious offenses.”

“Whatever.” The mongrel said, unable to suppress a smile.

Then Iason kissed him gently. “So, are you happy with our collection?”

Our collection? Riki liked the fact that Iason treated him as an equal partner in the art acquisition project and seemed to actively solicit feelings of ownership. “It’s all right,” he shrugged, apathetically. Then, after a pause, conceded with a smile, “actually it’s fucking amazing.”

Iason laughed. “Then please retire your vandalistic propensities; any future destruction of property will not be eligible for clemency. I’ll turn you over my knee and spank you every day for the rest of your life as punishment.”

“You already do that now,” the mongrel said, saucily.

“Take that tone with me again and I’ll spank you here and now,” Iason teased.

Riki put his hands together in a mock plea. "Have mercy, master. I'm fucking so sore I can hardly move. Speaking of which...do you think I could have another one of those pills you gave me?"

"No, pet."

"Why not?" he pouted.

"Enduring the discomfort is part of the punishment."

"Then why did you give me one yesterday?"

"Because," Iason said, "that was more than you could endure."

"Well, that fucking sucks," the mongrel muttered. Having to deal with such discomfort was the last thing he needed. It was enough that he had to endure what he was dreading with every fiber of his being—Raoul's visit that evening, and the commencement of their "one night" business arrangement. Raoul was coming over to fuck Iason and there was nothing he could do about it.

Thinking of this reminded him that there was one piece of their collection missing—Raoul's painting. He looked around. "Where is...the painting?"

The Blondie smiled slightly, knowing exactly what his pet referred to. "It's hanging in the observatory."

"Where the fuck's that?" Riki had never heard of the observatory.

"I suppose I've never shown you. I don't use it as often as I should...it's quite a shame, actually, given that it has one of the best telescopes in Tanagura. And there's something else in there that I haven't used in awhile," he said, turning to look at Riki with a mysterious smile, "that might be interesting to try out." He motioned to his pet as if to follow him and then walked past the library, stopping at what the mongrel had always assumed was simply a wall. Iason reached out and pushed a small button that Riki had never noticed before. Suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a door slid open, leading to a spiral staircase.

Surprised, and not a little amazed, Riki followed Iason up the small staircase that circled around a few times before arriving at a small, spherical room, the ceilings made entirely of observatory

glass, offering an unparalleled view of the heavens. With the press of a button, the entire ceiling structure could be retracted to reveal the open sky. An immense telescope stood in the middle of the room, and in one corner, sunk in the floor, was a hot tub. Near that was what appeared to be a fireplace— not the holographic type but an authentic replication of an old-fashioned wood-burning fireplace. The painting hung on one wall, and Riki stared at it for a few moments as if in pain. But for the painting, the room was sparsely decorated and was furnished only with a couch, and a set of chairs near the scope.

“I can’t believe no one told me this was here,” Riki said, a little annoyed. This was exactly the sort of place he would have loved to retreat to. He immediately gravitated toward the telescope, intensely curious, having never seen one before. “Can I look in this?”

Iason was intrigued with his pet’s obvious fascination with the telescope, wishing he’d thought of showing him the room sooner. He knew why he hadn’t...it was the room...where it had happened. Where he had caught Raoul with Anori Khosi. The room that had definitively ended his relationship with Raoul. An appropriate place, he had decided, for the painting.

“Look through here,” Iason said, pointing to the eyepiece.

“Fucking Jupiter! I can see...I don’t know what the fuck I see but it’s amazing.”

“That’s Alpha Zen.”

“So you know all the constellations and planets and everything?” Riki felt envious of the Blondie who seemed to be so knowledgeable about so many different things, especially when it came to subjects he’d always been interested in.

“Many of them.”

“Why don’t you ever come up here? This is fucking awesome! And why the hell didn’t anyone tell me we have a hot tub!” Riki sighed with exasperation, thinking how many times he would have enjoyed soaking in it after one of Iason’s brutal spankings.

“It wasn’t even filled until today. I haven’t used it in years.”

“Why did you fill it today?” Riki asked, and then, suddenly realizing the answer, fell silent, devastated. Iason had filled it because was bringing Raoul up here.

Iason saw Riki’s expression change as the mongrel realized his intentions. “Riki,” he said softly. “I have told you already, today...means nothing.”

Riki glared back, eyes dark. “It may be nothing to you. But for me...it’s not. And don’t give me that bullshit—if it means nothing, why are you bringing him up here for a night under the stars? So you can both jerk off together looking at your fucking painting? I suppose you’ll have a fire going as you fuck each other in the hot tub. Isn’t that just the most romantic thing ever. Fuck you, Iason.”

Furious, Riki moved to leave the room but Iason grabbed him. “Don’t walk away from me,” he said, sternly.

“Let go of me! Get your stinking hands off me!”

Angry, but at the same time aware that his pet’s misbehavior was driven by jealousy, Iason’s response was to pull Riki closer, holding him tight until he stopped resisting, until he finally broke down and wept.

“Don’t do it. Please, Iason,” he begged.

“Hush, love,” Iason said, stroking his hair. “It’s just one night.”

“That bastard...gets to use the hot tub first,” Riki lamented, adding this injustice to his list of grievances.

The Blondie laughed softly. “Is that what’s at the top of your list? Then why don’t you try it out, right now.”

Perking up with this offer, Riki wiped the tears from his face, looking up at Iason hopefully. “Will you get in with me?” he asked.

“What a question. Do you think I would miss it? Let me undress you.”

Iason slowly undressed his pet, feeling an instinctive stirring of lust as the mongrel’s naked body was revealed. As Riki turned to move toward the pool, his heart sank when he saw the dark bruises and welts that covered his backside. No wonder his pet had asked for a painkiller. Maybe a soak in the hot tub would do him some

good. Iason undressed as well, smiling as Riki tentatively put a toe in the water.

“It’s really warm!”

“Go ahead and get in.” The Blondie soon joined him, master and pet getting comfortable together for the first time in such a setting. Iason realized then he should have done this long before.

“This feels great,” Riki smiled, leaning against Iason with a little moan. The water stung him a little at first, but soon began to soothe his soreness.

“Yes it does,” Iason whispered, now becoming aroused by his pet’s naked wetness so close to his own.

As if reading his thoughts, Riki turned and began kissing his neck, setting the course toward intimacy in definite motion. With long, slow kisses, master and pet enjoyed one another, savoring the novelty of the setting and the additional stimulation of wet and glistening skin. Though Iason intensely wanted to take his pet, he worried that Riki was still torn from the previous day, so he asked to be pleased orally. He sat up on the ledge, legs apart, while the mongrel knelt in the water and skillfully stimulated him with his mouth and tongue, sucking gently while Iason’s breathing increased, then became gasps. The Blondie reached down and put his hands on his pet’s head, running his hands through his hair.

“That’s it...yes...just like that,” he whispered urgently, closing his eyes. “Don’t stop...oh!” Iason spread his legs a little more, thrusting his pelvis to offer himself more intimately to his pet. “Riki,” he breathed, then moaned loudly, throwing his head back and releasing with exquisite perfection, feeling his hot semen shoot deep inside the mongrel’s mouth.

After a few moments, he opened his eyes, smiling down at Riki. “Now...what do you want, pet?”

“Do the same for me...except...could I,” Riki’s voice dropped to a whisper, “come on your face?”

A little surprised at his pet’s request, Iason laughed softly. “Yes, love.”

So Riki perched on the ledge, spreading his legs eagerly for the Blondie master who pleased him so perfectly, his tongue exploring him slowly, lovingly. The mongrel closed his eyes and threw his head back, then watched the Blondie kneeling before him a little before throwing his head back again. Iason took his pet into his mouth with relaxed ease, bringing him quickly to his critical point.

“I’m gonna come.” Riki reached out and grabbed the Blondie’s hair, pulling his head back a bit as he withdrew. “Open your mouth a little...I want to see it shoot on your tongue,” he said, his voice strained as though he were in pain.

Iason obeyed, wiggling his tongue slightly to show his eagerness for him.

“Oh...Iason,” he moaned. “Fuck yes.” His pet ejaculated through gritted teeth, his essence spraying onto the Blondie’s beautiful face and mouth and onto his waiting tongue, a gift that Iason gladly swallowed, much to Riki’s utter delight.

Riki was started to feel much better, even though he still dreaded the evening. As they got out of the hot tub, he saw that Iason’s backside showed G-strap markings, and he smiled with delight, wondering how Raoul would react to them.

Both master and pet then realized that Daryl had quietly brought them towels, leaving them discretely by the door.

“That Daryl,” Riki said. “He’s really something.”

Iason thought about it for a moment and realized that his pet was right; Daryl had been an exceptional servant almost from the day he arrived, with only a few transgressions in the very beginning that were easily tamed with a little punishment, and a more recent one that he had perhaps punished a bit too severely. He counted the years in his mind and determined that it had been twelve years since he’d acquired him. Perhaps it was time to reward him for his sterling obedience.

After they got dressed and returned to the great hall, Iason called Daryl.

Daryl rushed over, bowing nervously. “Yes, Master Iason?”

“You asked to have Katze over this evening. If you like, you may go out into the city as long as you return by 1:00,” he said. “You’ve served me faithfully, Daryl, and I’ve decided to reward you. From this day on, the hours between 8:00 and 1:00 belong to you. You may go anywhere within the city and do as you please during that time.”

The gray-eyed youth stared at his Blondie master in disbelief. He’d never been out in the city, never gone anywhere, never had time that belonged just to him. Five hours each day. Unable to stop a tear from escaping down his face, he smiled. “Thank you, Master Iason. You are so kind to me.”

The Blondie felt moved by Daryl’s emotional response, wishing that he had thought to give him more freedoms sooner. Riki watched this exchange with surprise, thrilled that his master had finally acknowledged Daryl’s value and tireless service. He followed him out onto the balcony, where the youth had gone to regain his composure.

“I’m happy for you, Daryl,” he said, lighting up a smoke.

Daryl turned, smiling, still struggling to hold back the tears.

“So, where are you going to go tonight?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never been anywhere...I don’t know where to go.”

“Bet Katze knows a place or two,” Riki said, grinning. “Don’t worry, he’ll show you a good time. I envy you tonight.” The mongrel fell silent then, realizing that he would have to deal with Raoul’s visit without even Daryl’s companionship to attenuate his pain.

As if hearing his thoughts, Daryl said softly, “why don’t you come with us, Riki?”

“You don’t want me tagging along,” Riki protested with somewhat transparent hopefulness.

“I’d like you to come. Just the three of us—it’ll be fun.”

The dark-haired mongrel took a long drag, a slow smile creeping into his features. “Only if Katze agrees.”

“He will.” Daryl was confident in Katze’s response, having already told him about Raoul’s impending visit and eliciting sympathy for Riki’s situation.

“I’ll go ask Iason then,” Riki said, tossing his smoke over the ledge, and then making his way back inside.

The beautiful Blondie was sitting in his favorite chair near the window and looked up as his pet walked in. “Ah, Riki. Come here. I want to talk to you.”

Riki approached him, crawling onto his lap when signaled to do so. Iason put his arms around him, pulling him close, then began whispering in his ear. “Do we need to discuss what’s going to happen tonight? Or are you going to be obedient? I can ask Daryl to get out the chains if you think you can’t trust yourself to behave properly.”

“I won’t do anything.”

“Good boy. I don’t think you’d like it too much if I had to put you over my knee in your current state.”

“Iason,” Riki said after a pause, “could I go into the city with Daryl and Katze?”

The Blondie considered this for a moment. Perhaps this was the perfect solution to the evening’s potential awkwardness, relieving his pet from some of his torment. “As long as you are back with Daryl at 1:00, yes, pet, you may go.”

Riki’s excitement was so charming that Iason laughed softly, kissing him on the cheek. His pet kissed him back in the same manner. Then the Blondie put his hand behind his head and kissed him on the lips, slowly, gently, relishing his pet’s responsiveness. In that kiss, master and pet came to a kind of understanding that nothing further would be said about what was about to happen that night. Riki somehow felt comforted, and a little less consumed about the approaching evening. Iason had been exceptionally gentle with him the entire day, addressing him as “love” on numerous occasions, which had been a comfort to him. The dark-haired mongrel had never gone out into Tanagura at night and was looking

forward to it, exceedingly grateful to Daryl for inviting him along, and to Iason for letting him go.

Katze was the first to arrive that evening, a little before 8:00. Daryl greeted him at the door, grinning.

“What are you so happy about, love?” Katze asked, bending down to give him a little kiss.

“Iason says we can go out into the city,” he whispered. “He says every day, from now on, I can do as I please from 8:00 to 1:00.”

“Seriously?” A little surprised, Katze looked over at Iason, who noticed his arrival and beckoned to him.

“Katze. I need to talk to you.”

“Riki’s going with us tonight, I hope that’s okay,” Daryl said in a low voice.

“No problem.” Katze sauntered toward the Blondie, glancing around the room at all the new objects in awe. “So you finally replaced your collection. This one’s even better, I think.”

“Yes. I’m quite pleased with it.” Iason took a sip of his wine, gazing at Katze over the glass. “Katze. I’m allowing Riki to go with you tonight. I’m counting on you to watch over him.”

“He’s in safe hands,” Katze answered, with comforting reassurance. “You know I’d sooner give my life than let anything happen to your pet.”

Iason smiled, pleased with this answer. “You’re armed?”

“Of course.”

“I’ve increased your credit portfolio for all your expenses. I don’t want Riki using his ID—no one is to know who he is.”

“Understood. Don’t worry—no one will recognize him in Tanagura, so if he doesn’t give his scan or prints, there’s no way anyone will know him. He doesn’t look like a pet.”

“Very well. Try to keep him...occupied. You can leave now—it’s probably better, before Raoul arrives.”

“Where is he?”

“Out on the balcony.”

With a slight nod, Katze turned and went to retrieve the mongrel, who was sitting in his favorite spot on the ledge, smoking.

Seeing him, Riki smiled. "Want a smoke?"

"Dark Baccalias again, huh? Actually maybe we should get moving."

"I just lit this up. Come on, have one."

Katze hesitated only momentarily, accepting the proffered smoke with a grin. Daryl joined them on the balcony where the three of them conspired about the evening's plans.

"Neither of us know the city," Riki said. "So we're counting on you, Katze. Pick someplace good."

Katze took a deep drag, considering, then smiled. "I've got it. Serendipity. It's an open club with pet shows, including live pairings. Great music, too."

"Sounds fucking perfect to me," Riki said, grinning.

"What's an open club?" Daryl asked.

"A club without conduct restrictions—other than violence. You can jerk off or do whatever the hell you want, just as long as you pay the cover and then for your drinks and whatever else you purchase. You can buy time with pets, too. Or you can just go to watch and even pick who you want to see pair. No one cares what you do. As long as no one gets hurt."

"Yes, let's go!" Daryl grabbed hold of Katze, who put one arm around his neck possessively.

"Give me a kiss first," he demanded, and Riki couldn't resist watching initially as the two engaged in a long, deep kiss that betrayed their hunger for one another. He moved away to allow them some privacy though he desperately wanted to openly watch them.

"That was nice," Katze whispered, then, straightening up, "all right. Let's do it."

The three of them walked back inside the penthouse and headed for the door at the exact moment that Raoul arrived.

Daryl opened the door and the Blondie stepped in, his eyes meeting Riki's in a long stare, one that communicated triumph and contempt on the part of the Blondie and anger and hatred on the part of the mongrel. Raoul looked away first, searching out his prize.

Iason was still sitting in his chair by the window, sipping a glass of wine.

“Iason,” he said, with a slow smile.

“Come in, Raoul. Make yourself a drink.”

Riki turned and looked back at his Blondie master one last time. Master and pet shared a moment of quiet understanding, then the dark-haired mongrel turned away, following Daryl and Katze out of the penthouse.

Katze walked with his arm around Daryl’s shoulders and, glancing back at Riki and perceiving his sadness, put his arm around the mongrel’s neck as well. “Now it’s time for some real fun,” he said, grinning.

This elicited a smile from Riki, who actually experienced an erotic charge when the beautiful man put his arm around him, his warmth and sexuality both drawing him in. No wonder Daryl was so infatuated with Katze. The man was irresistible.

They reached Serendipity in a matter of minutes, Daryl staring out the window of the car with childlike amazement at the sights and sounds of the city.

“You got any painkillers, Katze?” Riki asked.

Grinning, Katze popped open a cabinet that appeared to be nothing less than a pharmacy. “Tell me your problem, and I’ll tell you what you need.”

“My problem is my ass is fucking killing me.”

Katze laughed. “Yes, word of your taming has spread fast. You quite terrified all the pets in Tanagura.”

“It’s not fucking funny,” Riki grumbled.

“I’m sure it wasn’t. My apologies. So...are you planning on drinking tonight?”

“Hell, yes.”

“Then I can’t give you anything more than an Opiate-3. Otherwise you’ll be dead and then my ass will be dead for killing your ass.”

“Anything’s better than nothing.”

Katze tossed him a bottle. “One. Just one. And don’t tell Iason.”

“Why the fuck would I tell Iason? It’d be like saying, please, master, discipline me some more!” Riki popped a pill and sighed, feeling better just knowing relief was on the way.

Daryl giggled. “So what were you doing last night, Riki? With Iason tied up like that?”

Katze grinned. “Tied up? Ooo. This sounds good.”

The mongrel smiled mischievously. “Iason was my pet last night. I got to use the G-strap on him and then fuck him.”

“Fucking liar.” Katze shook his head.

“It’s true! I brought him the G-strap,” Daryl avowed.

“Holy shit.”

“It was good, too,” Riki said, grinning.

“Yeah? What’s it like?”

“You wouldn’t believe me if I told you. He’s so fucking amazing, he feels so good—he squeezes you, like he pumps you.”

Now Katze and Daryl fell silent and Riki suddenly felt a little uncomfortable. He took out his smokes, offering one to Katze, who accepted. “Wanna try one, Daryl?” He held out the pack to Daryl, who shook his head shyly.

“We’re here,” Katze said, taking a deep drag as he put the vehicle into park. “Riki. You’re not to use your ID. I’m taking care of everything. Iason’s orders.”

Riki nodded. Daryl was staring out at the club, thrilled. Brightly colored lights advertised the club’s existence, and the entrance was like a tunnel, with lots of spinning lights leading to the actual door of the club. He’d never seen anything like it. Riki, of course, had, but he was just as excited as Daryl. It had been over two years since he’d gone to an open club.

The three of them giggled like schoolboys as they walked through the tunnel, which, from the spinning lights, created the disorienting optical illusion that they were falling. They grabbed onto each other in mock terror, now laughing so hard their stomachs hurt.

“Wait ‘til you try to walk out of here when you’re fucked up,” Katze said.

The door to the club automatically opened at their approach, and they stepped into nothing less than a pet paradise. Throughout the club were raised platforms where pets were displayed, some standing, some dancing, some actively pairing with other pets. Some of them were obviously former class-A pets and very beautiful. A live band played in one corner, their style a dirty funk with a hint of slum darkness.

“Let’s sit over there.” Katze pointed out a deserted corner situated near a platform and they all sat down, immediately punching in their orders. The attendant soon arrived with their choices—bourbon for Katze, sake for Riki, and port wine for Daryl.

“So, what do you think, Daryl?” Katze asked.

“It’s amazing. I can’t believe I’m actually here.” Daryl looked around, taking in the scene with disbelief. Everywhere people were copulating openly, some pairing up, others watching the pets perform.

“I say let’s call a pair. What do you think?” Riki suggested.

“Sure...why don’t you call it, Riki?”

“Let’s see,” the mongrel said, perusing the various pets that were available. “How about those two, Z3080 and G3002?”

Katze nodded and Daryl smiled, shrugging, so Riki punched in the order. Within seconds the two pets were walking towards their platform; they were two young men, both of them beautiful with exceptionally smooth, silky skin. But for their jeweled collars, they were both already naked. One stood behind the other and began working him, stroking him slowly to bring him to arousal.

The dark-haired mongrel watched with delight, becoming quickly aroused. He unfastened his trousers and began stroking himself, at first unaware that Katze and Daryl were more interested in watching him than in the pets.

Katze reached under the table and held Daryl’s hand, then began kissing Daryl’s neck, causing him to close his eyes and shudder.

Now Riki was fully aroused, his erection rigid and demanding release. He turned and saw Katze and Daryl kissing and began

watching them, unable to take his eyes off the ripples in Katze's arms as he stroked Daryl's hair and the seductive lines of Katze's throat. Closing his eyes, he threw his head back, starting to pump himself, actively fantasizing about Katze.

He opened them briefly and realized Katze was staring at him as Daryl was kissing his throat.

"See something you like?" he whispered.

Katze smiled, catching the reference to his own remark upon catching Riki leering in a similar manner.

"Why don't you come over here and suck me off then?" Riki teased.

"I would, but I'm spoken for," he answered, putting his arms around Daryl and drawing him close.

"Don't stop on my account," Daryl said, quietly.

"No?" Katze smiled.

"I mean seriously."

Katze stared at Daryl for a moment, then raised his eyebrows and looked at Riki, who grinned.

"You little pervert," he said softly, biting Daryl's neck. "You really wanna watch?"

"Ah!" Daryl cried out, as Katze sunk his teeth into his flesh. "Yes, I want to watch you...both of you."

"Kiss me first."

Riki watched the two of them kiss, his heart beginning to pound, his arousal now pushed to a new level. He couldn't believe what was about to happen, couldn't take his eyes off the intense intimacy displayed now before him. He parted his lips, panting softly.

"This is what I'd do to you," Katze whispered in Daryl's ear.

Then he turned his attention to the dark-haired mongrel with a devastatingly seductive look, his eyes glimmering, his lips curled in an experienced smile. Riki instinctively gasped as he moved towards him, knelt down and pushed his legs apart with dramatic firmness, pulling him suddenly to reposition him a little lower on the seat.

“Hell yes,” Riki breathed, offering himself with a little thrust of his pelvis.

Katze slid his hand around his shaft, pressing the head up against his lips and then licking him slowly, his tongue flicking tantalizingly before tasting him more thoroughly, with confident, purposeful paths.

“That’s good,” Riki encouraged. A glance at Daryl told him that Katze’s lover was enjoying the show, which helped him relax, even giving him a little thrill. He closed his eyes as Katze took him into his mouth, shivering from his exquisitely erotic embrace, and his unique style of sucking as he wiggled his tongue, his lips almost vibrating.

Riki let his fingers run through his hair, instinctively holding the sides of Katze’s head as he pleased him. He threw his head back, moaning. Two years of pent-up lust for the gorgeous underground leader of the Black Market now rose up within him, his arousal escalating beyond the point of return.

“I’m gonna come,” he warned, breathing hard. “Oh, fuck. Oh...Katze.” He felt his heart race as he realized Katze was going to swallow him. With a sudden moan, he thrust up into his mouth. “Fuck yes,” he groaned, eyes rolling back with ecstasy, as he released his essence into the hot wetness of his mouth.

Letting his head fall back onto the back of the booth, he kept his eyes closed for a moment, trying to regain his senses. He looked down to see Katze smiling up at him. “That was fucking unbelievable.”

“For me, as well,” Katze answered. He turned to look at Daryl. “What about you, love?”

Daryl grinned. “Me like.” Then, his expression changing a bit, “But if Iason ever finds out....”

“He won’t. There’s no one here but locals. No one even knows us.”

“I don’t fucking care if he finds out,” Riki said. “Even if he does, it was worth it.”

“Guess we paid for those pets for nothing,” Katze commented, and they all laughed as they realized no one had even watched them pair. He got up and returned to Daryl’s side, putting his arm around him and pulling him close, then whispering in his ear. “I love your perversions. I wanna love you tonight. Can I stay over?”

“Yes,” Daryl said, simply, shivering with anticipation.

Riki smiled as Katze and Daryl began kissing again. The night out had done wonders for his mood, and at the moment, he was doing pretty well. He wasn’t going to think about it...wasn’t going to imagine what was going on at that very moment...wasn’t going to torment himself with what was happening to Iason at the hands of Raoul. No, he wasn’t thinking about it. He wasn’t thinking about it at all.

Iason's Secret Love

Raoul made his way into the penthouse slowly, heading for the bar as Iason had suggested, his eyes never leaving the Blondie's face for a moment. Iason seemed distracted, staring out the window as he sipped his wine. He poured himself cognac, pleased to see that Iason still kept his favorite—Ambrosia.

Leaning back against the bar for a moment, Raoul simply stared at him until Iason finally looked up. Raoul smiled, his heart already beating a little faster just to be in the presence of his old lover, knowing that, within minutes, he would begin the night he had planned for so many long, lonely years, that he would finally have the beautiful Blondie in his arms.

"I've been waiting for this night...for so long. I still can hardly believe you said yes."

"So, Raoul. What do you have in mind?" He put his glass down and looked up at him with a slight smile.

Taking a sip of cognac and then setting his glass down on the bar loudly, Raoul took a few steps forward and lifted Iason to his feet, pressing him close as he kissed him passionately, wildly, feeling as though he couldn't get enough of him.

"I'm dying for you," he whispered, then in one easy motion lifted him and carried him into the bedroom, dropping him down on the bed. Lying on top of him, he continued kissing him, hard, running his hands down his body.

"Put your arms around me, Iason," he instructed, almost annoyed. "Love me."

Iason obeyed, sending Raoul into an even greater state of arousal. He flipped Iason over onto his stomach, unzipping his bodysuit violently and pulling it from him impatiently. "I must have you now," he said, then suddenly froze when he saw the strap marks on Iason's backside.

Knowing strap marks couldn't have been left by a pet, Raoul then realized Iason must be pairing with someone he didn't know about. Jealousy seized him, but he tried to push the feelings away. He wasn't about to let his perfect night be ruined. He was just going to let it go, for now.

The sight of Iason's beautiful body facedown on the bed was too much. With shaking hands, Raoul spread him apart for a better view, releasing his breath in a long sigh.

"I've missed you so much, Iason," he said, softly. "Stay just like that." He quickly undressed, then lay on top of him, pulling back the Blondie's hair so he could access his sensitive neck, where he began kissing him, thrilled when Iason responded with a series of gasps.

Now Raoul pressed up against him, ready to gain entrance, and just remained there for a few moments, savoring the feeling of Iason's complete submission and relishing what was coming next. "I've wanted to do this...for so long," he whispered into his ear, then began gently biting his throat as he slowly penetrated, sliding fully into his tight grip with a breathy moan.

"Oh. Iason. You feel so good." His eyes rolled back as he bit his lip, fighting the overwhelming urge to ejaculate.

Iason closed his eyes, shivering a little from the pleasure of Raoul's kisses as well as the feeling of him inside him again. For a moment Raoul just lay there, not moving, moaning, trying to control himself but realizing that there was simply no way he could last any amount of time, not this first time.

"I can't wait, love," he apologized, then began slowly thrusting, grabbing hold of Iason's shoulders for deeper penetration, and then plunging into him, hard, vocalizing each thrust in his characteristic

way, until he was there, shuddering ecstatically as he surrendered his seed.

He collapsed on Iason for a moment, then rolled off, pushing him onto his back. "Why are you so quiet?" he asked.

"No reason," came the soft reply.

"That was absolutely delicious." Raoul kissed him again, now more gently, exploring him as though for the first time, then moving to ravish his throat the way he knew Iason could not resist.

Iason gasped instinctively, closing his eyes as Raoul began stroking him while continuing to bite and kiss his neck. In terms of sexual technique, it was exactly right, eliciting a physical response that he was completely unable to deny.

"That's it," Raoul said, encouraged by his moans. "I know you like this."

Now painfully aroused, Iason found himself pushing on Raoul's shoulders, eager for the stimulation of his mouth.

"Say it."

"Take me in your mouth."

Smiling, Raoul obliged, tantalizing him with a long trail of kisses and licks down his chest and abdomen, then just below his pelvic bone at the spot that drove Iason wild, before he began slowly exploring his most sensitive regions with his tongue.

The Blondie spread his legs a little more, feeling as though he wanted to expose himself even more to Raoul's excruciatingly erotic lingual maneuvers; every movement was familiar, perfectly adapted to pleasure him specifically, and even after all these years Iason found that he responded just as intensely, as though no time had passed at all.

Parting his lips, he began arching his back, moaning as the Blondie took him part way in his mouth and held him there, swirling his tongue around in exactly the way that brought Iason quickest to orgasm.

"Raoul," he breathed, then moaned, loudly, thrusting a little into his mouth. "Oh, yes. That's perfect."

Sliding his fingers into Iason's mouth to get them wet, Raoul, with experienced ease, began thrusting into him for additional stimulation.

It was too much to bear. Crying out, Iason arched his back even more as he ejaculated into Raoul's mouth, completely transported from the pleasure.

Smiling, Raoul moved up beside him, leaning on his side. "Do you have any idea...how much I've missed that? And you never used to cry out like that. We're off to a great start here."

Still breathing a little hard, Iason made no answer. The sex had been exquisite, but now that it was over, he felt a little uncomfortable, though he wasn't exactly sure why.

Raoul kissed him, then pulled him close to whisper in his ear. "This is just the beginning. I have so much more I want to do tonight."

Iason laughed softly. "What do you want to do next?"

"Do you still use the hot tub?"

Iason smiled. He knew Raoul would ask about it. "Yes, it's ready for you, if that's what you'd like."

"Let's just lay here a bit. Then we'll go up there."

Raoul held him for quite awhile, running his hands up and down his body and through his hair, kissing him everywhere, and pulling him close. Both of them became aroused again, their bodies responding to the slightest touch of the other.

"Let's go." Raoul stood up, holding out his hand, then led him up to the observatory, a route he knew well.

When he saw the fireplace already lit and a stack of towels by the hot tub, he smiled. "So. You knew I'd want to come up here."

"I suspected you might. It was your favorite place."

He noticed the painting then. "Ah. I was wondering where you'd put it."

"It really is your finest work, Raoul."

Beaming at his praise, he drew Iason close to him for a gentle kiss, then led him down into the water. "I love your body," he whispered, running a hand over Iason's wet skin. "I love every inch

of you.” He kissed him then, urgently, suddenly overcome with certain very specific desires.

“On the ledge,” he instructed, a command Iason knew well. He turned around and bent over the edge of the sunken hot tub, his chest now on the floor while he knelt, his buttocks exposed just above the water. It was Raoul’s favorite position.

“Spread your legs more.” Raoul helped him with his own request, spreading him to get a better view of his portal, feeling strangely aroused by the strap marks quite visible on his backside. With wet fingers, he began stroking the area he knew Iason couldn’t resist, then reached around to find him already rigid.

Now on his own knees, Raoul ran his tongue from his portal to his manhood, thrilled when Iason pushed back against him, moaning. He slid his tongue inside the warm Blondie, wiggling and thrusting in a way that made Iason cry out. The cries of his old lover were simply too much to bear; Raoul desperately wanted to be inside him, needed to get close to him in a way only a good fucking could achieve.

Trembling, he moved up, finding his entrance and plunging in, thrusting as he pulled back on Iason’s hips, beside himself with the exquisiteness of the fuck. Unable to wait, Iason reached down and finished what Raoul had begun, bringing himself to orgasm in almost the same instant that the Blondie reached completion.

Collapsing forward onto his back, Raoul sighed. “I want this night to last forever.”

They settled back down into the tub, moving by habit into their familiar position, Iason leaning back against Raoul, between his legs.

“Iason,” he whispered in his ear. “Do you know...how much I love you?”

“Raoul,” he answered, after a long pause, “you know that, after tonight, this is all over.”

“I can’t believe you’d say that. When both of us know how much you’re enjoying this.”

“My body loves you,” he conceded, “but my heart loves someone else.”

Stung with this revelation, something that Iason had hinted at before, Raoul let his head fall back against the ledge. “Who is it? Is it that musician from the trade convention?”

“That’s none of your concern.”

“Is he the one who left those strap marks on you?”

“Again, Raoul. Not your concern.”

Trying a new tactic, Raoul leaned close and whispered in his ear. “You never told me you liked that sort of thing. I’d be happy to do...whatever you want.”

Iason smiled at Raoul’s misinterpretation of the strap marks, but remained silent.

Raoul sighed, almost growled, trying to work out in his mind who this mystery lover was. He’d been so preoccupied with Iason’s ridiculous pet that he hadn’t even considered the possibility that he was pairing with someone, or worse--that he had fallen in love. He smiled with some satisfaction when he realized that the mongrel was probably equally jealous of Iason’s new lover.

“Does he know I’m with you tonight?” he asked.

“Yes.”

“And he...allowed it?” Raoul was incredulous.

Iason laughed softly, again choosing not to answer.

“At least tell me if he’s the one who left these marks.”

The Blondie sighed. “Yes, he’s the one.”

Armed with this new knowledge, Raoul fell silent for some time, playing with Iason’s hair, part of which was submerged in the water. So. Iason was in love. And he had some very interesting sexual proclivities Raoul hadn’t uncovered during their relationship. This explained why his advances had been, for the most part, so unequivocally rebuffed. But how long had it been going on? And why had he allowed Iason to spend a night with an old pairing partner—what kind of lover would do that?

“I’m not giving you up,” he said finally. “After tonight, I can’t just walk away.”

“It’s not your choice, Raoul,” Iason said, exasperated.

“Just tell me who he is.”

Sighing, Iason attempted to get up, but Raoul pulled him back. “The night’s not over yet. You’re still mine to command.”

“Very well. What would you like to do next?”

“Let’s go down and get back in bed.” He grabbed hold of Iason’s shoulders, kissing his neck. “And then...you know what I want.”

The two Blondies dried off and made their way downstairs. In the bedroom Raoul lay down on the bed, spreading his legs and stroking his quickly developing erection as Iason stood for a moment, watching. Motioning him closer with one hand, Raoul presented himself with a little thrust, making his desire known.

Iason crawled onto the bed; as he approached him, Raoul reached out and grabbed his hair, guiding him to his now rigid organ, sighing when the Blondie obediently began pleasuring him with his tongue, then took him into his mouth in exactly the way Raoul wanted.

Raoul’s hands on his head soon directed the Blondie’s movements, becoming increasingly insistent until Iason simply relaxed his throat and let Raoul thrust up into his mouth.

“Ah, yes...so good,” Raoul moaned, then suddenly pulled the Blondie off him by his hair, and with his other hand ejaculated onto his face with a pained groan. It was something he had always loved to do with Iason; for some inexplicable reason, it made him feel as though he truly possessed him to see his essence dripping from the beautiful Blondie’s face.

Now feeling completely relaxed, Raoul lay with his eyes closed for some time. Iason got up and cleaned himself off, now feeling rather ready for the night to end. One of his headaches was coming on, much to his dismay, and he was forced to take a painkiller to stave it off. Much as he had physically enjoyed the sex, he realized that he would have much preferred it if it had been his pet instead. And now he found that he was worried about Riki; although he knew he was in good hands with Katze, the Blondie had never allowed his pet to go out into the city at night before. More than this,

he simply wanted him home. This would be the first night since he and Riki had become intimate that they would not be sleeping together. It was the first night that the one he loved was not the one in his bed....

Chapter 21

Revelations

“What are you doing?” Raoul leaned against the doorframe, completely naked, squinting at Iason, who was sitting in his chair by the window. He had unintentionally dozed off for a bit before waking up and realizing Iason was gone. “Come to bed,” he commanded.

“I have a slight headache,” the Blondie answered. “I’m just waiting for this opiate to kick in.”

“Well, hurry up. I want you next to me.”

Iason nodded, turning away to look out the window again. It was nearly 1:00 and Riki wasn’t back yet. Although he had given him permission to stay out until then, he had somehow expected the three of them would be back a little earlier. And now they were pushing the deadline—it was already 12:55. He began imagining the worst; what if there had been some sort of accident...?

Jumping up, he went to the terminal and activated the tracer, wondering why he hadn’t thought of doing so before. He had been so distracted by his headache, he just hadn’t been thinking straight. To his relief, he saw that Riki was already in the building. He switched off the screen and sat back down, tying his robe closed.

The door hummed open and the three stumbled in. It was immediately apparent that they had all been drinking, and while Katze and Daryl seemed to have handled their liquor well, Riki was in a sorry state, laughing loudly.

Upon seeing Iason waiting for him in his chair, Riki stopped in his tracks. “What, another spanking?” he said, then giggled.

“Come here, Riki.”

“I’ll come,” the mongrel said, seductively. “I’ll come right here. Wanna watch?” Riki then unzipped his pants and revealed himself, walking a few steps toward his Blondie master before falling to his knees and stroking himself with definite purpose. “Oh, I’m gonna come fast, too.”

“How much did he drink?” Iason asked, sharply.

“Apparently too much,” Katze answered, his arm over his mouth to suppress an almost irresistible urge to laugh. “My apologies.”

Iason sighed, unable to feeling angry at his pet, knowing the reason why he had become so intoxicated. “Riki, I told you to come here.”

“If I do, will you fuck me? I need you to fuck me, Iason. Really, really...bad. Or maybe suck me...oooo, could you do that too? See? I’m ready.” Riki laughed, turning to Katze. “I’m ready again, can you believe it?”

The Blondie’s eyes narrowed at this remark and he studied the three of them but said nothing. Despite the fact that he had already climaxed several times that night, he found that the sight of his pet exposing himself and begging for sex was arousing him. Realizing that Riki was in no shape to follow his orders, he got up, lifting him firmly to his feet, and then giving him a series of hard spansks, just enough to elicit a few yelps and get his pet’s attention.

“Obey me, Riki. You’ll come when I call you.”

“That...fucking...hurt, Iason,” Riki sulked. “What did you do that for?”

“Because I told you to come to me and you ignored me.”

The look of utter confusion on the mongrel’s face was priceless. “I’ll come on you if you want me to. Can I come on your face?”

“What’s all this bloody noise,” Raoul demanded. He stood in the doorway, hands on hips, still completely naked, completely oblivious to Daryl and Katze who gazed at his nude glory in wonderment.

“Nothing that you need to be concerned about, Raoul. I’ll handle it.”

Now Riki turned and, upon perceiving the Blondie, started to take off toward him. "You fucking bastard!"

Iason restrained him easily, punishing his pet with another warning spank.

"He needs some real discipline," Raoul said.

"In my house, whether or not he needs discipline is up to me."

Disgusted, Raoul turned and went back into the room. "Hurry up," he called. "I'm not finished with you yet."

The Blondie picked up his mongrel pet and carried him to his room—a room that Riki rarely used but where he would be sleeping that night. He lay him down on the bed, undressing him.

"You're always...spanking me," Riki complained.

"You're always disobeying me."

"The punishment doesn't fucking ever fit the crime," he lamented.

Iason laughed. "That was nothing. I hardly even swatted you. Surely you haven't forgotten what a real spanking feels like."

"Yeah but my ass really hurts, so one spank counted for like...twenty."

"What a fuss," Iason said softly. "There now, you're undressed and ready for bed."

"Huh? I'm sleeping here?"

"Just for tonight."

The mongrel pondered this for a moment, perplexed, then forgot what he was pondering and realized that Iason was leaning over him with nothing more than a robe on.

"Will you fuck me now?" he pleaded.

"Not tonight," he whispered.

"Why not?" Riki pouted. "Don't you want me?"

Iason reached down and kissed his forehead. "Of course I do. I'll love you tomorrow."

"Love me? I want you to fuck me."

"I'll do that, too, love. Now, go to sleep."

Now Riki rolled onto his stomach, reaching back around with his hands to spread himself with a little wiggle. “Fuck me, Iason,” he whispered.

The enticing view forced the Blondie to reconsider his pet’s offer. If this was what drinking did to his pet, he had not been giving Riki nearly enough to drink. Almost immediately developing a rock-hard erection, he came to the conclusion that a little after-midnight fucking was in order. He got up and locked the door. Then, untying his robe with one yank, he pushed Riki’s legs apart even further, pressing himself up against his so sweetly offered portal to gain entrance. Inching into his pet, he let out a deep breath as the mongrel moaned, partially from soreness and partially from arousal. He was raised up on his arms and so now slowly lowered down onto Riki’s back, nuzzling his cheek and whispering in his ear. “I’m fucking you now. Is this what you wanted?”

“Fuck...me...harder,” he gasped.

Shuddering, the Blondie honored the mongrel’s request, sliding his arms under his body and then pulling on his shoulders as he thrust hard, as deep as he could. He heard Riki reach orgasm beneath him, and he found this surprising, given the amount of alcohol his pet had imbibed. But the sound of Riki’s orgasms always pushed him past his critical point—he was ejaculating, too, unable to suppress a broken moan from escaping his lips.

Riki almost instantly fell asleep. Smiling, Iason covered him with sheets and bent down to kiss him.

Stirring from the kiss, the mongrel mumbled, “Don’t tell Iason. He’ll punish me. Just like before...our...secret.”

The Blondie stood for a moment, frozen, puzzling over the meaning of these words, then went to clean up before returning to bed.

Raoul was sitting up in bed when he returned to the room, arms crossed on his chest. “Did you seriously think I wouldn’t hear that?” he demanded.

“It’s no concern of yours what I do in my own house, Raoul.”

“This is supposed to be my night.”

“And so it is. Have I denied you anything you’ve asked for?”

Sulking, Raoul fell silent for a few moments. “Now you’re all used up and I wanted to pleasure you.”

“Surely you can think of something else that appeals to you.”

Raoul looked at him for a moment, then smiled. “There is one thing we haven’t done in awhile....”

* * *

“Did you see Raoul?” Katze whispered, as Iason carried Riki off to bed.

Daryl giggled. “You should see the painting.”

“That’s right! Where the hell is it?”

“I’ll show you.” Daryl took his hand and led him up to the observatory.

“So Iason is using this again?”

“Today was the first day since, I don’t know—.”

“Since the big break up?”

“Yeah.”

The fire was still going, though it was very low, and its illumination made the painting appear even more beautiful.

“Holy shit,” Katze breathed. They stood in front of the painting for a few moments, silent.

“I’ve never been to the ocean,” Daryl said, softly.

“Never?” Katze looked at him, then realized it was hardly surprising. Daryl had never been anywhere until this very night. He smiled, already devising a plan to take his lover to the sea one night.

“Iason is so beautiful,” Daryl whispered.

“Okay. Now I’m jealous.”

“Oh, Katze! I didn’t mean....”

“Hush.” Katze put his arms around him from behind. “Don’t you know when I’m teasing you, love?”

“Katze,” he said after a pause, “why do you call me that—love?”

“Don’t you know, silly boy? Because I love you, Daryl. You’re the love of my life.”

“I...am?”

“I guess I didn’t do a good job of driving that fact home last time,” he said, whispering in his ear, then gently kissing his neck. “Let’s see if I can do a better job tonight.” Gently turning him around, Katze then bent down and gave Daryl a long, slow kiss.

Daryl was beside himself with happiness. No one had ever told him they loved him, and now he’d heard these words from the one person in the world from whom he wanted to hear them most. “Katze,” he said after a moment, “did you know...I love you, too. I’ve loved you for a long time.”

“I know.” Katze smiled. “Come here.” He led him by the hand to the sofa, then gently pushed him down on it. He moved on top of him, kissing him and running his hands through his hair. “Daryl. I loved it when you wanted to watch me with Riki. Sometimes you really...surprise me.”

“I liked watching.” Eyes glowing, Daryl smiled in an unequivocally seductive way.

Katze moaned. “When you look at me like that...it almost...”

“Makes you feel like a man?”

“Yes. Exactly that. But Daryl...I am a man. And so are you. Nothing can change that.”

“I know that...now,” he answered, smiling.

“Tonight, my love, I want to kiss and stroke every inch of your body. And then,” he held up a couple fingers, wiggling them with a naughty smile, “there’s something else I want to try. If you want to.”

“Yes. I want to,” Daryl whispered, his heart beating with excitement.

Katze smiled, then bent down and began exploring his lover’s neck, kissing and licking as Daryl gasped beneath him.

* * *

Riki woke up with a killer headache, totally confused about why he was in his room and not with Iason. Groaning, he got dressed and cleaned up, then wandered into the great hall, where Iason and

Raoul were eating at the table. Riki walked over to Iason, who turned his face up for a kiss, before sitting down at the table, just as he did every day.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?” Raoul demanded.

“Waiting for breakfast.” Riki let his forehead hit the table, moaning. “Please let there be coffee.”

As if anticipating his state, Daryl rushed in with a fresh pot of coffee, along with Riki’s breakfast.

“Daryl. I love you forever,” Riki proclaimed, pouring himself an extra-large serving of java.

Raoul looked at Iason incredulously. “You let your pet eat at your table with you?”

“Raoul. Look outside. It’s generally agreed that the presence of the sun suggests that the night is over. You’ve had your one night per our agreement. You’re welcome to stay and finish your breakfast, but please refrain from commenting on my household affairs.”

Riki smiled smugly at the infuriated Blondie, who glared back at him.

“Wipe that smirk off your face, you little punk, or I’ll come over there and wipe it off for you.”

“Bring it on, Blondie. I’ll tear you up so bad you won’t be able to fuck your sister anymore.”

“Hush, both of you!” Iason sighed, exasperated. “You’re like two children.”

“Don’t put me on the same level with him!” Raoul protested, then muttered, “Filthy mongrel.”

“Say that to my face, you fucking pervert!”

Raoul leapt from his chair, reaching Riki before Iason could even respond. He pulled him to his feet by his arm so violently that the shoulder dislocated, and Riki began screaming in an ear-piercing manner.

“Let him go!” Iason shouted. “Raoul, you moron! Get out!” He rushed to his pet’s side as Daryl and Katze both ran into the room.

“Hold him for me! I’ve got to push it back in!”

“What happened?” Katze asked.

“His shoulder! Raoul dislocated his shoulder.”

Raoul watched the scene with a mixture of pleasure at Riki’s anguish and sorrow at being ordered to leave. He made no move to do so, but simply stood there, watching. As Daryl and Katze held the mongrel down, Iason managed to pop the shoulder back in its socket, much to Riki’s immediate relief. Although he felt like threatening Raoul, he managed to keep quiet, relishing Iason’s fury. Whipping around to face Raoul, the Blondie pointed to the door.

“Raoul, I told you to leave.”

“You’re going to kick me out like this. After everything we just shared last night?”

“Last night,” Iason said, trying to control his anger, “was nothing more than a business arrangement. I made that perfectly clear to you. So please, Raoul...just go.”

Locking eyes with Riki, the Blondie and mongrel shared a long stare seething with mutual hatred. Turning back to Iason, Raoul bent down as if, by some bizarre delusion, expecting to get a goodbye kiss. Turning his face away and stepping back, Iason made his view on this project clear. Hurt, angry, and a little bewildered, the Blondie turned and left the penthouse without another word.

“Can you move your arm?” Katze asked.

“Yes...but I don’t really want to,” Riki answered. “But I’m okay.”

“It’s gonna hurt a bit later.”

“Since all of you are here,” Iason said, sitting back down, “there’s something I want to talk to you about. Sit.”

Exchanging glances, the Riki, Daryl and Katze sat down at the table, waiting.

Iason was slow in speaking, taking a sip of coffee and then looking each one of them in the eyes. “Why don’t we begin by you telling me where exactly you went last night.”

A long silence followed, and then Katze answered, “We went to a club called Serendipity.”

Iason nodded. "An open club. Yes, I know. I checked the tracer logs. I've already talked to the owner of the club, and it seems he remembers the three of you. It's funny," he continued with a soft laugh, "that he particularly remembers a dark mongrel engaging in...certain sexual acts. He wasn't sure exactly who it was with. And then last night, Riki made a few comments that got me wondering. So. We're going to sit here until someone tells me exactly what happened last night."

For a moment, no one said a word. Riki felt his heart racing faster. He saw where this was going and he realized that he was probably already doomed. He couldn't escape punishment, but he could still save Katze.

"It's true," Riki confessed, finally. "I met someone there and...I was a little drunk. And I was pissed off at you, Iason. I know it was stupid."

For a long moment Iason didn't reply, a little stunned with the immediate confession. He had been hoping that there had been some mistake and found that he was quite unprepared for the rumor to be true.

Now he turned to Katze and Daryl. "And you two didn't stop him?" he said, sharply.

"They tried," Riki interjected, "but you know how I am when I'm set on doing something. Please don't blame them, Iason."

The Blondie gazed for a moment at his pet. "Daryl. Katze. You may go."

Dismissed, both men shot grateful looks to Riki, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

Iason remained silent, his anger starting to rise as the full implications of what his pet had done sunk in. He felt hurt, and—he had to acknowledge it—jealous. "So. You actually confess to it? I really can't believe you'd do such a thing, Riki." He sighed. "You know I have to punish you."

His pet sunk a little lower in his seat.

"Come here."

Slowly, Riki approached his Blondie master, climbing onto his lap when signaled to. Now Iason pulled him close, whispering in his ear, "Have you any idea how much discipline you're in for? You're really in for it this time, Riki."

Trembling, Riki said nothing, waiting for his master's command.

"However, given your current state, I don't think you can handle what you have coming. So. I'm going to delay disciplining you for a few days. This is the 224th. You'll be punished on the 228th. You can spend the next few days thinking about what you did and what's coming. As soon as I come home on the 228th you can expect to be quite severely punished."

"What...are you going to do to me?" Riki asked, weakly.

"Haven't decided yet. Understand, pet, this is one of the most disobedient things you've ever done. You require significant correction."

The mongrel sighed.

"Now. How is your arm?"

"It...hurts."

"Do you need something for it?"

"An Opiate-6?" Riki cried.

Iason laughed softly. "More like an Opiate-3."

"Oh. Yeah, that'd be good."

The Blondie called Daryl and had him retrieve the painkiller for Riki. Then Iason began kissing his neck, sending shivers through the dark mongrel. "I wanted you in my bed last night," he whispered.

"That wasn't my fault," Riki said, darkly. "Why do you think I was so fucking pissed off at you?"

"Hush."

"Iason," he said, slowly. "Did you fuck me last night...in my room?"

A soft laugh told him the answer, and Riki smiled.

"You were quite persuasive," the Blondie said. "Do you remember?"

“Not really.”

“Pet. I want to take you now. Go undress and lie on the bed.”

“Don’t I get breakfast first?” Riki whined.

“Now!”

With an exaggerated sigh, the mongrel obeyed, dropping his clothes on the floor apathetically as he undressed and made his way to the bedroom.

His Blondie master followed him, noting that the bruises, though still dark, were a little more faded on his backside. Riki crawled onto the bed and lay on his back, legs apart. Just the sight of the beautiful mongrel’s body sent spasms of arousal through the Blondie. He lay down beside his pet, running a hand down his body to the pet ring, which he activated with a single touch. Arching his back, Riki moaned, becoming fully erect in less than a minute.

Lying on the mongrel, Iason began kissing him hungrily, feeling as though there was a part of his pet he couldn’t access, a part that had defied him to pursue sexual intimacy with someone else. He wanted Riki to be his, and his alone.

“Pet,” he whispered, over and over, as he covered the mongrel’s body with kisses and small bites.

Panting, Riki reached down to stroke his Blondie master with trembling fingers. “What do you want?” he asked.

“I want you.” Now Iason guided his engorged member to his pet’s portal, trying to gain entrance. “Spread your legs a little more, love. I can’t penetrate.”

“That’s because I can’t relax until I’ve had breakfast,” Riki growled.

Smiling, Iason began fondling his pet with masterful strokes designed to bring him to orgasm quickly.

“Yeah, do it like that. Just keep going...don’t stop,” his pet panted. “Holy fuck, I’m gonna fucking come already!” The mongrel arched his back again and with a strangled cry voiced his consummation.

His essence spraying onto them both, Riki lay limply on the bed, relaxing enough for Iason to gain entry. The Blondie gasped,

his pet still, for some reason, extraordinarily tight. “Oh...Riki,” he breathed, bending down to kiss his neck as he began thrusting.

Despite all the sex of the previous day, Iason found that his lust for Riki was as strong as ever...and he felt...soooo good, hot...and tight. Some of his anger and frustration with Riki now was funneled into his fucking, and he began thrusting so hard that he vocalized each stroke with a small grunt. He was furious with Riki but was trying to hold down his anger, keep it repressed until he could unleash it fully. His pet was really in for it. The mongrel really had no clue at how angry he was. He couldn't wait until it was time to punish his pet for his outrageous misconduct, planning to discipline him thoroughly and then fuck him just as thoroughly. Riki would be begging for mercy before the night was through.

As he took his pet with increasingly violent strokes, his desire to acquire his pet's heart, as well as his body, consumed him, along with his jealousy and anger, adding an element of torment to an otherwise unquestionably beautiful fuck.

Day of Atonement - Part I

Waiting for punishment, Riki decided, was punishment in and of itself. Each day he tormented himself with whatever the fuck Iason had meant by “severely punished,” trying to determine in what way the upcoming punishment would be different from all the others he had endured at the hands of his strict Blondie master. Under what perverted definition had any of his punishments not been severe? What worried him most was Iason’s attitude. Since the night of his transgression he had been decidedly distant. Not cold, exactly, but almost as though he was pulling back from their intimacy and reestablishing the boundaries of master and pet.

It had started the very first day. When Iason arrived home, he didn’t call for Riki right away as he usually did, didn’t order him to sit on his lap, a daily routine that he had come to rather enjoy. Instead, Iason sat in his chair, sipping wine and reading a periodical for a long time, while the mongrel watched him from the balcony. He considered approaching his master but decided against it, wondering why Iason had not called him and what sort of mood he was in. Finally, the Blondie put down his periodical.

“Pet. Come here,” he commanded.

Riki immediately obeyed, standing hesitantly before him when the Blondie made no signal for him to sit on his lap.

“Take off your clothes.”

A little surprised, the mongrel did so, wondering exactly what his master had in mind.

“Now, pet. Copulate.”

Feeling his face grow hot, Riki then realized Iason had reverted back to his early voyeuristic practice of watching him masturbate, and he found that, given all the intimacy they had shared, he felt hurt by it, and by the almost clinical command, “copulate.”

“What are you waiting for?” Iason demanded.

Slowly, he began stimulating himself, stroking himself with practiced ease, leaning back against the bar as he opened his legs a little wider to increase the stability of his stance. He closed his eyes, parting his lips, then opened them to see that Iason was watching him with lust-filled eyes. Closing his eyes again and throwing back his head, he fantasized about tying his Blondie master down and strapping him, then fucking him, hard, relishing the sound of Iason’s moans....

A series of quick gasps announced his impending release, and as he ejaculated with a long moan, he looked straight into his master’s eyes where, for a moment, he saw a slight opening to the Iason he intimately knew, a softening of the hardness that had settled there.

Then Iason was on his feet, leading him by the arm to the dining room table, and bending him over it. “Put your arms over your head,” he ordered, and Riki did so, feeling a little disconcerted with his master’s terse commands.

Pushing his legs apart with his foot, Iason unfastened his trousers and, with no fanfare, penetrated his pet fully. Riki cried out his dismay at being taken without preparation for, although Iason was not being particularly violent, he had certainly shown his pet no consideration. The pain of the penetration hurt less than his master’s callous attitude.

The Blondie was enjoying his pet’s discomfort and confusion. In truth, he was now quite angry with Riki. It was all he could do to wait until he could unleash his full fury onto his pet. In the meantime the only way he could contain his anger was to keep a distance, and to treat Riki more like the pet he was, even though—or perhaps because—he knew how much the mongrel despised being treated as nothing more than a pet.

Whenever he thought about Riki with another man, he felt like trashing the apartment himself—if he could get his hands on the man, he'd break his back in a heartbeat. He simply couldn't believe Riki had done it. The Blondie had never experienced jealousy like this in his entire life—even when he had discovered Raoul's infidelity. With Raoul, he had simply realized that his pairing partner didn't truly love him, a fact that he had already been entertaining in his own mind. By that time, Iason didn't even love Raoul anymore, and the revelation simply served as a good excuse to end a relationship he had been uncertain about for some time.

But with Riki, his pet, it was completely different. As foolish as he knew it was to have such feelings, Iason loved the dark-haired mongrel. He no longer even tried to fight it. And there had been times when it seemed as though Riki returned some of his feelings. At the very least, he was usually obedient in the bedroom. And now, to find that his pet had solicited and accepted the sexual intimacy of another man was...well, heartbreaking.

Iason grabbed hold of his pet's hips and pulled back as he took him with quick thrusts designed not to prolong the sexual act but to produce consummation in the most efficient way possible. No savoring, no holding back—just raw fucking to get the job done. As soon as he came, the Blondie withdrew and walked away, returning to his chair.

“You can get dressed now, pet.”

The mongrel lay bent over the table for a moment, struggling with his emotions. Iason had never treated him like this—at least not since the very early days, and even then he was sure he had never been this cold and disinterested. For a moment, he felt as though he might cry. Then, Riki the Dark, leader of Bison, seemed to take over.

He got up and retrieved his clothes in a nonchalant manner designed to let Iason know he hadn't won.

The second night began as a repeat of the first—Iason summoned him to the living quarters and ordered him to undress and copulate. This time, Riki had some revenge. As he began

stroking himself, he began actively fantasizing about Katze, becoming increasingly excited, his exaggerated gasps and moans surprising his Blondie master.

“Oh yeah,” Riki whispered. “Yessss.” He looked over at Iason with a small smile of triumph.

Somehow, Iason suspected that his pet was deliberately fantasizing about this mystery man, or at least trying to make him think he was. And there was nothing he could do about it. He couldn't control what his pet thought about. He couldn't even prove that he was doing so. All he could do was watch him come, and Riki's enthusiasm was certainly accomplishing one thing—it was getting him hot.

“Oh,” Riki breathed. “Fucking Jupiter! Oh fuck yes!” He ejaculated a copious amount of his essence, trails of ivory semen dripping down his hand.

Iason was immediately ready, standing up and unfastening his trousers. “Bend over,” he commanded. “Put your hands on the floor.”

“On the floor?” Riki said in disbelief. “What the fuck—”

“Obey me, pet.”

The mongrel then attempted to follow Iason's orders, finding that he had to walk his hands forward a bit to reach a position he could actually sustain. His legs wide apart, his body in an inverted V, Riki felt extremely exposed and helpless when his Blondie master once again took him without preparation, this time harder. He cried out; something about the position allowed deeper penetration than he'd ever experienced before, and Iason was taking him almost angrily, with deep, vindictive thrusts.

Once Iason had ejaculated, it was the same story as the previous night—he withdrew and left his pet to clean up and get dressed on his own.

By the third night, Riki was pissed off about the whole situation. When Iason instructed him to masturbate, he did so almost angrily, copulating as quickly as possible and trying to hide all his pleasure to give his master as little enjoyment as possible. This time Iason

had him lie, faceup on the table, with his head hanging over the edge. The Blondie then proceeded to fuck him in the mouth, again copulating and leaving without ceremony.

Neither of them had mentioned the punishment that was now just a day away, but there was a definite tension between them. Although they still slept in the same bed, they didn't share their usual intimacy, didn't hold one another or kiss, and both of them were starting to miss this, though neither wanted to be the one to initiate it.

When Riki woke up on the day of punishment, he felt a sense of relief. He wanted things to go back to normal and he knew that, after today—after he had been thoroughly disciplined—Iason would forgive him.

Katze came over to visit Daryl in the afternoon and found Riki on the balcony, brooding.

"So. Daryl told me. Today's the big day of atonement, huh."

Riki nodded, taking a drag from his smoke.

"I really owe you," Katze said, after a pause. "You didn't have to do that."

Riki smiled. "Yeah, I did. Iason would've killed you. You know that."

"You're probably right. But I still owe you. So," he held out his hand, "here's something I thought you might appreciate. It's an Opiate-3. I couldn't give you an Opiate-6 because Iason would be able to tell you were on something."

"Fucking awesome," Riki said, taking the pill. "This will be perfect for tomorrow morning."

"Do you know what he's going to do?"

"No. But when Iason is pissed off, he gets pretty physical."

Katze shook his head. "I'm sorry, Riki."

"Don't be. I told you—it was worth it. Although I couldn't believe Daryl was cool with it."

"Isn't he something else? I love his little perversions."

"Whose perversions?" Daryl asked, joining them on the balcony.

"Yours, angel," Katze said, grabbing him and pulling him close.

Daryl smiled. "I just came out to let you know, Iason called to say he's coming home early tonight. Should be here within the hour."

"Fuck." Riki tossed his smoke over the ledge. "Oh well, I'll just be glad to get it over with. I'm so fucking sick of worrying about it."

"I guess I better get outta here," Katze said, giving Daryl a kiss. "Want me to come back tonight?"

"Pick me up, and we'll go to your place for awhile."

"Sounds good."

Riki sighed, wishing that he had an evening ahead like Daryl and Katze were going to share. The last hour waiting for Iason to return home seemed an eternity. When finally the door hummed open, he felt his heart starting to pound. Almost immediately, he heard his master's stern command.

"Riki. Come here."

He made his way slowly into the house, almost afraid to look at Iason, who sat in his chair by the window. His eyes immediately gravitated to the architect's ruler on the table beside the Blondie. So. That answered one of his questions.

"Sit." Iason pointed to his lap, and Riki climbed onto it, the first time he had done so in the past few days.

For a moment, his master didn't speak, then he pulled him close to whisper in his ear. "It's time for your punishment, pet. I hope you've been thinking about just how disobedient you were. Because I intend to punish you tonight like you've never been punished before." Iason's voice shook, betraying his anger.

Shivering, and knowing that it was probably hopeless, Riki decided to try talking his way out of it. "I have been thinking about it, and I know I was completely disobedient. But it...didn't mean anything. It was just one time."

"One time, a thousand times...it makes no difference. What matters is that you did it. That's more than enough."

"Please, Iason, I'm really scared. I know you have to punish me, but can't it be like...a regular punishment, not some huge other punishment?"

“Not open for negotiation, Riki.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

“First, I’m taking away your city privileges. I gave you those privileges contingent on your good behavior, so until further notice you no longer have clearance to go into Tanagura.”

“What!” Riki cried. “That fucking sucks!”

Iason smiled. “Pet. Might I advise you not to anger me before I’m finished doling out your punishment?”

“Well, it does suck,” he muttered. “But...is that it, then?”

The Blondie laughed softly. “Did you really think you’d get off with such a slim punishment as that? No, pet. I’ve also reprogrammed your pet ring. Since you were unable to control your copulation, it appears I’m going to have to control it for you. From now on, you will not be able to ejaculate until I choose to let you do so.”

Riki listened in disbelief. Not be able to come without Iason’s permission? Not even to masturbate in private? He sighed.

“Can I go now?” he asked, hopefully.

Iason laughed again. “Come now. You must know there’s more punishment coming--we haven’t even started yet. And I must say, I’m really looking forward to it. Because you really deserve it.”

“Then fucking get it over with,” he grumbled.

“Now,” Iason whispered, “when you’re thinking about how much this hurts—because it is going to hurt—I want you to remember that you brought this on yourself with your own disobedience and stupidity.”

“Whatever.”

Iason set him back on his feet firmly. “Lower your trousers.”

As soon as Riki did so, the Blondie grabbed him and repositioned him on his knee, pinning his arms behind his back with one hand. Then he removed his right glove with his teeth, tossed it aside and picked up the ruler. He let Riki squirm for a few minutes, resting the ruler on his pet’s flesh at the place where the buttocks met with the thighs, just letting the mongrel feel its cold metal.

“Before I’m finished, you’re going to fully regret what you did, pet. You’ll be begging for mercy. And you’ll never forget this lesson about what it means to be a pet.” His voice shaking and hands trembling with anger, Iason bent a little closer to the mongrel. “When it comes to your body, no one, Riki, touches it but me, or whoever else I decide to have you pair with. You have absolutely no say in such matters. You chose to openly defy my authority, and now you’re going to feel the consequences of your choice.”

Then, with a sharp initial strike to his pet’s bare bottom, he proceeded to spank his pet mercilessly with the metal ruler, eliciting anguished cries almost immediately. But his pet’s cries only fueled his anger, and Iason derived great satisfaction in watching him suffer.

“Please stop,” Riki begged. “Fucking...oh please!!”

The more Riki begged, the harder he struck. All the hurt and rage that he had bottled up for the past few days funneled into his arm, his punishing blows carrying far more than discipline alone. They communicated his hurt, jealousy and betrayal, all the things that the Blondie could not say to his unruly pet.

“So, was it worth it, Riki? Would you still have done it if you knew this was coming? You’re my pet, and mine alone! I’ll drive that fact into you!” The fury in Iason’s voice was terrifying in and of itself.

From Riki’s perspective it was simply the worse spanking he could ever remember. Iason just wouldn’t stop—no matter how much he begged and sobbed. At the moment he was not so sure Katze had been worth it after all. This was pure hell—and he had foolishly felt momentarily relieved that it wasn’t a taming stick, not realizing the suffering Iason’s new implement could cause. Striking him with unrestrained fury, the Blondie was unrelenting in his punishment, to the point where Riki began screaming and kicking.

Finally, Iason stopped, his whole body shaking. He set the ruler down and just watched his pet sobbing, now limp on his lap. He began tracing a finger down Riki’s punished flesh, then inserted it into him with a little wiggle, taking advantage of his pet’s vulnerable

state for a little molestation. Confused by his master's actions, Riki quieted, hoping that Iason didn't have something...truly...awful in mind. His imagination provided a number of horrifying images involving his most sensitive places...but surely torture wasn't Iason's...style.

After a few minutes of fondling, Iason set his pet back on his feet. Riki reached down to pull up his trousers.

"Leave them down. We're not finished. In fact, take off all your clothes."

As Riki slowly obeyed, Iason rose and went to the desk that held the special drawer, popping it open with a little smile at his pet. The mongrel watched with dread, wondering what exactly he would pull out. When he saw his master lift out the taming stick, he fell to his knees in alarm.

"Please, Iason. I'm begging you. Please, anything but that."

Riki's abject terror surprised him a little. He had only picked up the taming stick to get to the G-strap beneath it. But he would have to remember how much his pet hated to be tamed. The G-strap, however, had a unique advantage over the taming stick, and the Blondie had in mind a little sexual torture to round out Riki's punishment.

When Riki saw Iason exchange the taming stick for the G-strap, he felt a tremendous sense of relief—relief that was perhaps unwarranted could he have foreseen what was coming next.

"On the bed, pet. Facedown."

The mongrel obeyed, making for the bedroom with a slight glance behind him. Iason followed him, relishing the red vestiges of his recent spanking covering his buttocks and thighs.

In the bedroom, Iason opened a drawer and took out two cuffs, cuffing his wrists firmly to the bedposts. Then, with an angry flick of his wrist, he activated the G-strap with a snap, startling his pet.

"I've never really had a chance to use this properly," Iason said. "So tonight I thought I'd really put my back into it."

Groaning, Riki buried his face in the bed. Bound, there was nothing he could do but submit to whatever his master had in

mind—not that he could have done anything if he weren't cuffed. Yet something about the cuffs gave him a sinking feeling, as if Iason was hinting there was a reason for him to try and escape.

The Blondie snapped the G-strap a few times simply to terrorize his pet.

"Iason," Riki tried, "I've learned my lesson already from that spanking. My ass feels like it's on fire. I get it—I really do. I shouldn't have let him suck me off."

Iason laughed softly. "I don't think you do get it, pet. It's not just about you understanding your transgression. You knew it was wrong before you even did it. Riki, you're being punished. Nothing you can say or do now will stop what you have coming. When it comes to discipline, the matter is out of your hands."

"But—"

"Hush!" Now the Blondie's voice boomed through the room. His fury reinvigorated by the imagery suggested by the "I shouldn't have let him suck me off" comment, Iason whipped back his arm and sent the strap flying, hitting the mongrel's thighs with a loud crack.

Riki cried out from the very first strike. "Holy shit...please, Iason," he pleaded in despair.

Ignoring—even relishing—his pet's plea, the Blondie commenced with a thoroughly brutal strapping as his pet squirmed and tugged on his cuffs, crying out all the while. Iason wanted him to suffer, wanted him to experience in physical terms the pain that had tormented him since learning of Riki's sexual exploits. He was still furious and felt as though he couldn't punish his pet enough, though strike after strike met its mark on the mongrel's punished flesh. He struck so hard that his body twisted as his arm came down and whipped back, his hair swinging around him as he moved. Even in his fury the Blondie was beautiful--perhaps even more so, his face betraying usually guarded emotions and passion, his eyes intense with anger.

"Please...Ma...Master!"

Feeling a carnal surge when his pet began calling him Master, something that Riki never did, Iason finally brought the strapping to an end, breathing hard from the exertion. He had broken out in a sweat, something he rarely did except when punishing his pet.

Now Riki was starting to feel the effects of the G-strap, and began moaning and thrusting into the bed. Flipping off the strap, Iason undressed as he watched his pet writhing, smiling with the knowledge that Riki would not be able to release until he permitted it. He got up on the bed and just sat there for a few moments, staring down at his punished pet. His buttocks and thighs were red, covered with the markings of his punishment, a sight that Iason found extraordinarily stimulating. Riki's erotic thrusting against the bed only added to his lust.

Punishing Riki always gave the Blondie a sexual charge, and tonight was no exception. Tonight, in fact, Iason was so aroused that his erection was already rigid, throbbing almost comically. With trembling hands, he lifted his pet's hips.

"Get on your knees," he whispered.

Riki obeyed, letting out a loud moan when Iason began tantalizing him with his tongue, licking and thrusting into his portal in a sensual manner designed to bring him quickly to orgasm. But today, the mongrel was not able to release his near-bursting lust until Iason allowed it, and he began groaning with frustration.

"Please touch me," he begged.

Ignoring his pet's request, Iason continued his unbearable titillation, swirling his tongue everywhere between his legs and then thrusting into him once again.

"Please...let me come," Riki pleaded. "Please!"

Smiling, the Blondie rose up onto his knees and repositioned his pet, then pushed himself up against the mongrel to gain entrance, penetrating as hard as he could.

Riki cried out from pain and sexual frustration, a sound that only sent shivers of excitement through his Blondie master.

"I am your master," Iason whispered fiercely as he thrust hard, again, withdrew slowly and then plunged a third time, "and you are

my pet.” Then he proceeded to give his pet a good, hard fucking, one that had Riki continually moaning and begging for release. As he reached his peak, Iason reached around and touched the pet ring, his unique signature removing the restrictions on the ring. With a few swift strokes, Iason brought his pet to orgasm, much to Riki’s obvious delight—and relief.

“Holy mother fucking Jupiter!” Riki cried out, ejaculating what appeared to be a copious amount of semen for the little mongrel, his cries sending Iason over the edge. Whipping his head back, his hair flying overhead in an arc, he moaned, loudly, as his seed found release in the punished sanctum of his pet.

Both of them falling forward on the bed, they lay for some moments. Iason nuzzled up against his pet, kissing his cheek.

“Does this mean the punishment’s over?” Riki asked timidly.

“Yes, love.”

Relieved, the mongrel tugged on the cuffs. “Can you uncuff me? I want to kiss you.”

Smiling, Iason obliged, thrilled with Riki’s attitude. He returned to the bed and, almost immediately, master and pet began hungrily exploring one another, kissing and fondling passionately as though for the first time. It had been four days since they had loved, or even shown much affection, to one another, and both of them had desperately missed their intimacy.

“Iason...I love your body,” Riki said. “I missed you.”

The Blondie relished this comment, pulling him close.

“I only did it because I was pissed off, because of Raoul,” he continued. “I don’t like the idea of anyone else touching you, either.”

Iason laughed softly. “Is that so? Did you forget who was the master, and who was the pet?”

The dark-haired mongrel sighed. “Why does it always have to be like that?”

“Riki,” Iason said, gently, “I will always be your master, and you will always be my pet. It’s just how it is. It’s the world we live in.”

“Yeah but don’t you ever think there’s something fundamentally fucked up about the world we live in?”

“A philosophical question, not a practical one, pet. The world is what it is. Besides. Do you really think I’d give up having you as my pet?” Tracing a finger down the mongrel’s cheek, Iason smiled. “And I think we both know there are times you enjoy being my pet.”

Shivering, Riki looked up at the beautiful Blondie, wondering how he could know so much about his private thoughts, how he managed at times to look into his very soul, perceiving his darkest secrets. Somehow he had determined that Riki had come to accept—even enjoy—being his pet at times. He wondered if Iason knew...that he loved him. With a sigh, he surrendered when the Blondie pulled him close, then began kissing him slowly, softly, melting away all his resistance. Tonight, anyway, he would be Iason’s...completely.

Day of Atonement - Part II

Riki was absolutely melting from Iason's kiss. It truly seemed as though the Blondie had never kissed him so sweetly before, his tongue tracing slow circles around the mongrel's tongue, gently prodding his mouth open for complete access. His passion was gentle but insistent, becoming increasingly urgent, one hand stroking his pet's face or running through his hair. With a moan, Iason pulled away.

"I want you again, pet," he whispered.

Riki smiled. Although they had both climaxed just minutes before, it had been part of his punishment, and he was anxious for some real pleasure at the hands of his Blondie master. Iason was formidable when it came to discipline, but he was just as masterful in the ways of sexual love. From the G-strap he had inherited a second healthy erection, and he was more than willing to obey Iason's every command. And they were making up for four days of lost time together, a separation that both of them had keenly felt.

"What do you want?" Riki asked, his voice low and seductive.

Smiling, the Blondie rolled onto his back, pulling his pet onto him, and then turning his head to the side to expose his neck. With gentle nibbles and kisses, the mongrel began exploring his master's throat, flicking his tongue in erotic trails up to his ear, where he bit gently on his earlobe. With a series of gasps, Iason closed his eyes, surrendering to the waves of pleasure that swept over him. Riki had learned how to stimulate him perfectly; now the mongrel's hand slid down to that particular place below his pelvic bone that Iason couldn't resist, stroking him at the same time he ravished his neck.

With a soft moan, he rested his hands on Riki's shoulders, pushing him firmly to signal his desire. His pet dutifully began a trail of kisses and bites from his chest to his abdomen, then worked his way lower with his tongue, exploring the entire region. He moved between his master's legs and, hooking both hands behind his knees, pushed his thighs towards his shoulders for better access to the Blondie's most sensitive region. Then with deliberate slowness, he pleased him with his tongue, leaving no place unexplored or unmolested, a project that Iason commented on through a series of gasps and moans. Then he swirled his tongue around his master's portal, flicking it tantalizingly until finally thrusting it inside.

"Riki," Iason moaned, delighted.

Next he let the Blondie's legs back down and moved higher to begin pleasuring his sex organ, which was now fully engorged. He slipped one hand around the shaft and began licking the very tip, swirling around slowly on just the head, the way Iason liked it. He let his tongue glide the entire length of the Blondie's member, then, after wetting his fingers, pressed the head up to his lips, parting his lips slowly, as though reluctantly, allowing just the head inside. Holding him there for a moment, he began wiggling his tongue, and, at the same time, he slid his fingers into the Blondie's inner sanctum, thrusting into its hot wetness.

Iason cried out, almost startling his pet, who paused for a moment.

"Lie facedown on the bed," Iason whispered, almost gasped.

A little surprised that his master had something else in mind, Riki obeyed, glancing back to see what Iason was doing.

The Blondie was on his knees, looking down at the mongrel's body with an intense lust he hadn't seen in quite awhile. He was stroking himself and looked about ready to climax.

Pushing his legs together firmly, Iason straddled him, then pressed himself up to his pet, wiggling around until he found the entrance he sought. He pressed in just a bit to position himself, then pinned Riki's arms behind his back with one hand while he

guided himself inside him with the other. He slid inside easily, quickly, his pet already lubricated from his own essence. Iason looked down, watching his shaft sink past his pet's punished flesh into the sweet embrace within and a long moan escaped his lips. His body slowly undulating as he fucked his prostrate pet, the Blondie was pure erotica in motion.

This was Iason's favorite position, and having just punished his pet, the markings of discipline were prominently displayed on Riki's reddened bottom, with raised areas and various markings from the ruler and the strap evidencing the extent of the punishment. He found the sight enormously stimulating. He reviewed in his mind administering the punishment, with his pet kicking and screaming over his knee as he spanked him, then writhing on the bed under the fury of the G- strap. Shuddering, he moaned again.

"Oh pet," he said brokenly, "You complete me."

Then, before Riki could really respond, Iason threw back his head and vocalized his release, which, from the sound of it, was nothing short of spectacular.

Glad for his release, but desperate for his own, his pet wiggled up to his master, thrusting against his leg. Laughing softly, Iason began stroking him. "Tell me what you want, pet."

"Can I fuck you?" the mongrel asked, emboldened by his own lust.

Smiling, the Blondie nodded his agreement, exciting his pet so much that he stood up on the bed, trying to decide what to do.

Iason laughed again. "What are you doing, love?"

"Trying to decide...how I want to take you." Then smiling, he fell back onto the bed. "Turn over— get on your hands and knees. And now scoot back a bit, so you're almost off the end of the bed."

The Blondie did so, and Riki rolled off the bed and stood behind his master's beautiful bare ass.

"Now, put your head down on the bed...yes...just like that." Grinning, Riki simply enjoyed the view for a moment, then pressed himself up to the inviting portal. Running his hands down Iason's hips and thighs, he shivered with anticipation.

“Now I’m gonna fuck you,” he announced, then plunged himself full strength into the Blondie, groaning from the intense physical pleasure of his master’s tight grip.

“Oh yeah...fucking yes,” Riki moaned, spreading his own legs apart a bit to increase his stability. There was nothing in the world that could possibly compare to fucking a Blondie, he decided. When Iason began contracting and squeezing against him, it was all too much. “Fucking Jupiter...oh fuck, Iason...that’s so fucking good!” And, much sooner than he wanted it to end, the mongrel released his lust into the irresistible tightness of his master’s sanctum with a loud, broken cry.

Riki fell forward onto Iason’s back and for a few moments just remained there before finally withdrawing and joining the Blondie on the bed. Iason pulled him close. “I think you liked that, pet,” he said, softly.

“It was fucking awesome...as always. I’m jealous of your ass. How the fuck do you do that?”

Iason’s answer to that was a soft laugh, as he kissed Riki on the cheek.

“Iason,” Riki began.

“Yes, my love?”

“What did you mean...when you said I complete you?”

The Blondie paused for a moment, puzzling over this, then remembered what his pet referred to. “I meant, as master and pet, we are one unit.”

“Oh.” Riki paused for a moment. “Did you fuck your other pets?”

“That’s not your concern,” Iason said, then, seeing his pet’s pout, chuckled, touching a finger to his nose. “But I’ll tell you. No. You are the only one.”

“Why me?”

Iason sighed. It was a question he had asked himself many times. “I am not sure, Riki.”

He got out of bed and put on his silk lounge pants, something that he hardly ever wore but which accentuated his exceptionally

well-sculpted upper body; the mongrel marveled over the incongruity of his long blonde—nearly white—hair, which seemed delicate and feminine against the masculinity of his rippling muscles. “I could do with some wine, and we both need dinner.”

“It’s all ready, Daryl told me what to do,” Riki answered, getting up and tugging on his pants. He was thinking about how much he wanted a smoke. He picked up his shirt and, before he realized what was happening, he watched with horror as the small little pill Katze had slipped him rolled across the floor and spun around a few times before settling down. He glanced up to see Iason puzzling over it. Then the Blondie’s eyes met his and a look of comprehension and anger flashed onto his face.

Riki leapt forward to retrieve it but Iason was equally fast. Though the mongrel managed to snatch it up, his Blondie master grabbed his wrist and painfully began squeezing. “Drop it.” Though he tried with all his might, he couldn’t resist the strength of the Blondie, and so finally Riki opened his hand with a little yelp of pain.

Iason caught the pill as soon as it dropped, but continued to hold onto Riki’s wrist. He examined it, then sighed. “An Opiate-3, Riki? Where did you get this?”

Riki refused to answer.

“I said, where did you get this?” Now Iason’s voice was louder, harsher. “Answer me, pet!” When the mongrel remained silent, he sighed. “I see. You had in mind taking some of the sting out of your punishment, when I’ve made it clear to you that discomfort is part of the discipline. And now you refuse to answer me or divulge your source. Well then, pet. I guess tonight’s punishment isn’t over after all. You’re in for another spanking.”

Iason pulled him toward the bed, but Riki fought him, pulling against him with all his strength. “No, Iason! Please!”

But he was no match for the Blondie, who was already sitting down on the edge of the bed, preparing to position his pet over his knee.

“My arm!” Riki suddenly yelled, and Iason, fearing that he had dislocated his injured shoulder, immediately let go of his wrist.

It was just the opportunity the mongrel had hoped for. Dashing out of the room, he ran through the penthouse, desperate to find someplace to escape another punishment session at the hands of his Blondie master.

“Riki!” Iason snapped, furious, taking off after him.

Without even thinking about it, his pet made for the observatory, realizing as he stumbled up the steps that he was trapping himself. When he reached the top he locked the door and entered in random numbers, hoping to jam the access board. He could hear Iason coming up the steps slowly, as though he knew his pet had no escape. “Now this is going to be so much worse for you,” he warned.

Riki looked around and, out of desperation, grabbed a towel and picked up one of the chairs, hurling it toward the observatory sphere. The glass shattered, and he threw the towel onto the broken glass, peering out at what appeared to be a ledge encircling the observatory. Now hearing that Iason had unlocked the door, he stepped out onto the ledge, which suddenly seemed much more narrow than it had looked from inside. He crept along the ledge a few feet until he came to the side of the building, realizing that he was trapped. He looked down and almost passed out when he saw how high up he was.

“Riki!” Iason shouted, running towards the broken glass. Seeing his pet on the ledge, huddled next to the wall, he immediately got out onto the ledge, holding out his arm. “Give me your hand!”

Too frightened to move, Riki simply stared back, eyes wide. He was more afraid of falling than anything, but at the same time he had no desire to move closer to the Blondie who intended to punish him. With a few graceful steps, the Blondie was close enough to gather his pet with one arm, balancing him on his hip like a child, then carrying him inside.

He hugged him tight—almost painfully so—for a long moment, then set him on the ground firmly and then shook him furiously. “What were you thinking? You could have been killed!”

Then he yanked down Riki’s trousers, spanking him on the spot, just enough to let his pet know how angry he was before he dragged him over to the sofa and turned him over his knee. Though his pet had unfortunately already been thoroughly punished that night, there was no helping some major correction now; his foolishness and disobedience had almost led to a disastrous outcome, not to mention the fact that he had been deceptive and unruly and had broken expensive panels in the observatory sphere.

So despite Riki’s heart-wrenching yelps and cries, the Blondie gave him the full force of his arm, a spanking that was nearly intolerable for the already sore mongrel.

“That was the stupidest thing you’ve ever done, Riki,” he scolded. “And how dare you run away from me like that! It would have been much easier on you if you had taken your punishment downstairs. Naughty pet!”

In his misery, the only thing his pet could do was take it, and pray that it would end soon. Eventually it did end, and then Iason lifted him up gently and pulled him close. Riki sobbed, burying his face in his master’s chest, hiding beneath his hair.

“There now,” Iason soothed.

“I hate you,” Riki sobbed.

Iason’s gentle touch was reassuring as he stroked his back. “Surely you know why I had to punish you,” he said, softly, then sighed. “All you have to do is be obedient, pet. Is that really so hard?”

“You’re...mean,” Riki sniffed.

The Blondie smiled. “Now, now. I’m exactly as mean as I need to be to keep you in line.”

“You...don’t care about me at all.”

“Oh, Riki. If anything had happened to you....” Now he hugged him tightly, closing his eyes. “I care about you more than anything

else in this world. I have to punish you sometimes for your own good.”

Sighing, his pet began playing with Iason’s hair, desperately wanting his master’s love and approval. Iason, sensing his pet’s change of mood, bent down and kissed him softly on the lips.

For a long time they sat there together, the Blondie comforting his miserable pet under a star-filled sky, bathed in the light of the twin moons Ios and Erphanes.

The Threesome

“Ready to go?” Katze smiled, bending down to give Daryl a little kiss.

“Yes,” he whispered, glancing behind him.

Katze nodded toward the closed door of Iason’s bedroom.

“So...have they moved onto other things now?”

“I think so,” Daryl said, shaking his head. “Poor Riki.”

“That bad, huh?”

Daryl shivered. “One of the worst.”

Taking his hand, Katze smiled. “Well, it sounds like he’s pretty happy in there now. Let’s go.”

Daryl smiled as he led him out of the penthouse and down to his vehicle. “Where are we going?”

“You’ll see.” Katze’s mysterious smile gave him goosebumps. He was always going out of his way to show him new and interesting things in the city, and although what Daryl wanted most was simply to be alone with him, he was thrilled with his lover’s thoughtfulness. Since he and Katze had started seeing each other, Daryl felt as though he had a reason to get up in the morning, as though all of his life had led up to these wonderful, carefree days with the most amazing man he had ever met, or could ever imagine meeting. Katze seemed devoted to making him happy and to bringing him pleasure, and Daryl found that he loved him so much, it hurt.

“So what did the old bugger do to him?” Katze pulled into traffic, pissing off a passerby who honked in an exaggerated fashion as though he had committed the most egregious offense. He held

his arm out the window and gave him the finger. "Come back here, I'll fucking kick your ass!" he yelled out the window.

Daryl giggled. He loved it when Katze played the "tough man," acting in ways he would never dare. He was so exciting to be with.

"Stupid fucker," muttered, lighting up a smoke. "So?"

"Oh. Well, first he spanked him pretty hard with a metal ruler."

"Ouch."

"Yeah, and that went on practically forever. And after that he tied him to the bed and gave him a strapping. Plus, he took away his city privileges and put a release restriction on his pet ring."

Katze exhaled, shaking his head. "Iason can be a mean fucker when he wants to."

"He was pretty mad."

"So I gather." He paused for a moment. "I can't imagine what he'd do to me."

"Let's not think about it," Daryl shuddered.

"Actually, there's only one thing he could take away from me now that I really care about."

"What's that?"

Daryl's innocence was almost too much to bear. "You," he smiled, exhaling and leaning forward. "Kiss me."

"You're driving!"

"I can kiss and drive at the same time. Come on. Just a little one."

"Watch the road!"

"Take that tone with me and I'll put you over my knee," he teased. "Mind me, Daryl."

Daryl gave him a quick kiss, retreating with a look of worry etched in his features.

"Relax, sweetheart. I've been driving since I was twelve." He settled back into his seat with a sigh. "And that was the most pathetic kiss ever."

"I'll give you a really good one when we stop," Daryl said in a meek, hurt voice.

Katze turned. "Oh, love. I wasn't serious, darling. Don't you know when I'm kidding?"

Daryl wiped a tear from his eye.

"Hey." Katze pulled the car over to the side of the road, tossing his smoke out the window. "Hold on now. I'm sorry. I wasn't—come here." He pulled Daryl close, sighing. "I'm such an asshole."

Daryl shook his head furiously. "No. It's me. I'm the one who ruins everything."

Katze took hold of his chin and said, sternly, "Hush. I don't ever want to hear you talk like that." Then he bent down and kissed him slowly, gently, relishing when Daryl returned his kiss. Several minutes later, he pulled away, grinning. "Now that's a kiss."

Daryl smiled as Katze pulled back into traffic, once again infuriating a passerby. "Come back here and I'll fucking shove that horn up your ass," he yelled.

Daryl giggled again, then looked out the window. "Hey. Are we leaving the city?"

"Maybe we are, and maybe we're not."

"I think we are."

Katze just smiled, raising his eyebrows.

"Where are we going?"

"It's a surprise."

Daryl was so excited, he was practically jumping in his seat. "Tell me!"

"Did you hear me, young man? Impatient, naughty passengers get spankings."

"I want a spanking," Daryl said with a saucy little smile.

Katze looked over at him for a moment, considering. "Oh, you do? Well then." He pulled the car over again.

"No! I was just kidding!"

"Too late. Impatient, naughty passengers who tease the driver get extra hard spankings." Now Katze moved the seat back and grabbed Daryl, who squealed and giggled. "Come here, you."

"Help!"

“You know you deserve it.” Katze yanked down his pants and turned him over his knee, giving him a playful spanking that was just hard enough to be exciting for them both. “That’ll teach you to mind me,” he said, pulling his pants back up and setting him back on the seat.

“That was fun,” Daryl breathed.

Katze stared at him for a moment, then grabbed him, almost furiously. “Shit. I fucking love your perversions!” And for several moments they kissed again, more passionately this time, until finally he pulled away. “We’re never going to get there at this rate.”

“Look before you merge!”

Katze turned and stared at Daryl with a look of disbelief. “Are you telling me how to drive now? Do you want another spanking?”

Daryl giggled and Katze smiled, pulling into traffic as a passing vehicle honked hysterically. This time Katze held his gun out the window. “Fucking come back here you moron! I’ll blow your fucking brains out!”

Shaking his head, Daryl stared at Katze, feeling so much love for him that he could hardly stand it.

They drove for another half hour and then Katze rolled down the windows. Daryl sniffed the air. “It smells...different. What’s that sound?”

“We’re almost there.” Now Katze slowed the car and suddenly, straight ahead, the ocean came into view.

Daryl gasped, leaning forward. The twin moons had just risen and hung low and swollen red in the sky, their beauty reflected in the water below. Dark waves came rolling onto the beach. “It’s the ocean! It’s the ocean!”

Katze grinned at Daryl’s response. It was just what he’d hoped for. He pulled closer, to the edge of the beach. “Let’s get out.”

He didn’t have to tell Daryl twice—the gray-eyed youth immediately got out of the car and started walking toward the water. Katze grabbed his hand and Daryl squeezed it. “It really is the ocean,” he breathed.

“Let’s take off our shoes and socks,” Katze directed, and they both did so, then walked hand in hand down to the water.

When they reached the wet sands and the waves rolled up against their bare feet, Daryl squealed. “This is wonderful...this is so much more beautiful than the painting even. It feels good on my toes.” He turned to Katze. “I can’t...even begin to tell you how much this means to me.”

“Your eyes tell me everything,” he whispered, bending down to kiss him. They stood together thus on the dark sands of the sea, under the red glow of the twin moons, sharing a long moment of intimacy. Finally Katze broke away. “I have something for you.”

“For me?” Daryl blinked.

Katze smiled, pulling a mysterious object from his pocket, then putting it in his hand. Daryl looked down, surprised. It was a chain, on which hung a pendant. Inscribed on the pendant were the words, “Yours always. Katze.” He looked up at Katze, tears forming in his eyes.

“I hope it’s the right size. I wanted it to be long enough so you could wear it next to your heart, just like how you’re in my heart.”

Daryl looked up at him, eyes wide. “Katze...you’re...really giving this to me?” No one had ever given him anything, certainly nothing like this, and he was almost in a state of shock.

Laughing, Katze took the chain from him and put it around his neck. “Perfect. I guess this is my way of asking you...if we could be exclusive from now on?”

Exclusive? Daryl blinked. “You’re the only man I’ve ever...been with. You’re the only one I’d ever want to be with.”

“So is that a yes?”

Smiling, Daryl nodded. “Yes...of course yes! I love you more than anything, Katze.”

“And I,” Katze bent down to give him a little kiss, “absolutely adore you, my love. Let’s get undressed and have a little fun, okay?”

“Like...Ios and Erphanes?”

“Exactly like that.”

“Won’t we get sand everywhere?”

“Details, details. Come on. Don’t you want to at least try it out? Anyway we can rinse off in the ocean if we need to.”

Katze pulled off his shirt, his beautiful, muscular upper body melting all Daryl’s reserves. They both undressed, tossing their clothes up onto the dry sands. Once they were completely naked, they stood for a moment, exploring one another and kissing passionately, hungrily.

Then Katze began biting and licking Daryl’s throat, eliciting gasps of pleasure. He pulled Daryl down onto the sands. “Get on your knees.”

Daryl obeyed and they kissed thus for a few moments.

“Now, turn around, love. On your hands and knees,” Katze whispered, and as Daryl did so, added, “Spread your legs more...that’s it. Now get down on your elbows.”

Smiling, Katze pressed his hands onto the firm buttocks of his young lover, spreading him to reveal his virgin portal.

“Are you...doing what you did before...with your fingers?” Daryl asked, breathlessly.

“No. Something different this time. You’ll like it, I promise.”

Then, slowly, he began exploring him with his tongue, flicking and swirling along the entire perineum, as Daryl gasped with pleasure. “Oh! Katze!” Then, as he began circling his portal, Daryl wiggled with delight. “Yes! Right there!”

Katze tantalized him thus for awhile, then finally slithered his tongue past the portal into his lover’s sanctum. Daryl cried out, spreading his legs a little more and dropping his upper body lower in his eagerness for more stimulation. Katze continued pleasuring him for some time, then moaned. “Oh, love, I wish I could fuck you.”

“I wish it, too,” Daryl admitted.

“You’ve never even had the experience...it’s not right.”

“But as you said, there’s nothing we can do about it, so....”

Now Katze pulled Daryl to him and they lay for awhile in the sands as the ocean broke against them. Each time the waves broke up against them, Daryl gave a little squeal of delight.

Katze laughed. "You're such a child," he whispered.

"I'm...sorry."

"Don't be. It's what I love about you." He fell silent for a moment. "You know, there is a way I could give you...a more complete experience."

"How?"

"Well...if you wanted to...we could ask someone to join us, love. With both of us together...it could be pretty interesting."

Daryl was quiet for a moment, then smiled. "I'd like that."

"I knew you would, you little pervert!" Katze laughed, hugging him. "God, I love you so fucking much."

"But who would we ask?"

"Well, I was thinking Riki."

"But he's just been punished something awful for what happened at Serendipity."

"Well this time we do it someplace private. Like at the penthouse when Iason's at work. So Iason can never find out."

"I guess we could ask him and let him decide."

Katze grinned. "He'll say yes. He's a little pervert too, that one."

"I would be more comfortable with him than anyone...seeing as we've already done things together."

"That was my thought, too."

"What if he says no?"

"I don't think he will. But if he does, that's fine. I'll find someone."

Now Daryl was excited. "When can we do it?"

Katze laughed. "Oh, my baby wants a fucking, huh?"

"Yes! I want to get fucked!"

"If you really want to get fucked, I could always bring over a toy."

"Okay."

"Well that was easy!" Katze laughed. "I didn't have to talk you into that at all!"

"Whatever you want to do...I'll do it," Daryl replied.

“Ooo, now you’re giving me all kinds of naughty ideas. But first, I say we try out this plan with Riki. Now that we’ve decided on it I’m kinda anxious to do it.”

“Me too!”

Katze pushed him down onto the sands, pressing his body on top of him. “Then it’ll be like I’m fucking you. I’ll have him do what I can’t do to you. But only I get to kiss you.” He bent down and kissed him possessively, then broke away. “I can kiss you, just like this, while he’s fucking you. Fuck...I’m so excited, I’m shaking.”

Daryl laughed. “When can we do it?”

“Don’t know. I’ll have to clear my schedule at work. It might mean working a few long hours so I can take some time off midday.”

“What if...Iason catches us?”

“Then...well, to be honest, love, then we’re dead. And...maybe we should think more carefully about this.”

“He never comes home during the day,” Daryl said. “There would be no way for him to find out.”

“But if he did,” Katze sighed. “Hold on. I’m starting to have second thoughts.”

“Really?” Daryl’s disappointment was heartbreaking.

“It’s just...I can’t stand the thought of what he might do to you. If he hurt you—”

“I’m not scared. I can take it.”

Katze smiled. “That’s because he’s not standing over you at the moment, prepared to break your neck.”

“I don’t think he’d kill me. He’d probably whip me, though.”

“I can guarantee you, whatever he did, it wouldn’t be a pleasant experience.”

They fell silent for a few moments.

“Katze?”

“Yes, love?”

“I still want to do it.”

He sighed. “Yeah. So do I.” Pulling Daryl close, he whispered in his ear. “I want so much to give you pleasure.”

“You do...give me pleasure. Unlike anything I’ve ever felt before.”

“I want to give you more. I want to give you...everything.”

For a long time they just lay there on the wet sands, allowing the tide to wash over them, together in a place not quite land or sea, like Ios and Erphanes.

* * *

It was a good week before they had the opportunity to approach Riki with their request. That particular week had been remarkably peaceful at the penthouse, and the dark-haired mongrel had managed to stay out of trouble, enjoying Iason’s favor without incurring his wrath.

He was on the balcony one afternoon, smoking, when Katze joined him.

“Hey,” he said, offering Katze a smoke.

“Thanks.” Katze lit up, giving him a long look.

“Is something...up? What are you doing here?”

“I want to ask you something, Riki. And it’s okay if you say no.”

Riki grinned. “This sounds interesting.”

“Yeah...it could be. See, Daryl...well, he’s never really—that is, I’m crazy about the kid. And there are certain things I wish I could do. But I can’t. But you...could. You get my meaning?”

The mongrel stared back at him for a moment. “Are you asking me to fuck him?”

“I thought maybe all of us together—”

“You want a three-way?” Riki laughed, delighted.

Katze smiled. “What do you think?”

“Fuck yes!”

“Before you commit, you have to be really sure you wanna take this risk. If Iason ever found out....”

Riki fell silent. “That’s true,” he said, after a pause. “And I just thought of something else. Dammit! It would be torture for me, with this fucking pet ring restricting me.”

“Don’t worry about that. Daryl knows how to turn off the restriction. At least he thinks he can figure it out.”

“Where is he, anyway?”

Katze turned. “Daryl! Come out here.” He turned back. “I thought if both of us came at you, you’d feel cornered into or something. I wanted to make sure you were really cool with it.”

Daryl appeared on the balcony, looking a little nervous.

“You still think you can disable the restriction on his pet ring?” Katze asked.

He nodded. “Everything’s programmed from the main terminal. I’m sure I can remove the restriction at least temporarily.”

“If that’s the case...when did you want to do it?”

Katze and Daryl exchanged glances. “How about...right now?” Katze suggested, grinning.

Riki nodded, a slow smile creeping onto his face. “Iason won’t be back for hours. This is probably the perfect time.”

“We’re going to do it?” Daryl was so excited, he was practically jumping up and down. He grabbed Katze’s arm.

“All right, get in there and get the pet ring restriction off.” Katze instructed. They followed Daryl into the great hall where the computer terminal was situated at the communications command center and both stood behind Daryl as he worked.

Daryl typed quickly, easily, completing the task in a manner of minutes.

“You’re amazing on this thing,” Riki said, almost enviously. He had no idea how to even operate a computer.

“You’re good to go,” Daryl said. “Feel a difference?”

“Yeah, actually, I do.” A huge sense of relief washed over the mongrel, who had been walking around with the restriction for over a week. “I feel like I can actually come now.”

For a moment the three of them just stared at each other, then, almost in unison, they began smiling.

“Where...do we start?” Riki asked.

“How about let’s go into the master bedroom, since the bed there is the biggest,” Katze suggested, putting his arms around Daryl from behind him as they made their way into bedroom.

“Anything goes,” Katze said. “Except one thing—only Daryl and I kiss one another.”

“No problem. Katze, why don’t you run the show? Tell us what to do.” Riki stood, hands on his hips, a naughty grin on his face.

“Let’s get undressed,” he replied, pulling off his shirt to reveal his beautiful upper body, sending shivers through the mongrel. Riki threw off his shirt, then his pants, but Daryl hesitated. “What is it, love?” Katze whispered, bending down.

“He’s never...seen me.”

“Come on. This is all about feeling good, so let those old useless emotions go.”

“It’s all right, Daryl,” Riki said. He stood with his legs apart, his body lean yet muscular, his dark coppery skin adding to his masculine beauty. Already he was getting an erection in anticipation of what was going to happen.

Daryl stared at him in awe, seeming to forget all about his apprehensions. Katze helped pull his shirt off and unzipped his pants, encouraging him to take them off as he removed his own. Then, when they were both completely naked, he bent down and kissed him, pulling him close.

Riki was admittedly curious about what he would see, and was a little surprised when there simply wasn’t much to see at all. He had expected some scarring surely, but, by whatever technology the procedure had been done, both Daryl and Katze were simply devoid of the expected organs, and not unattractive to look at. Both of them had deep, tantalizing hollows between their pelvic bones, almost like women, and from what he could discern, they must have also been rebuilt like women for their bladder functions, though he couldn’t see the opening. In fact, they seemed more like beautiful exotic creatures than castrated men, and he found, just looking at them, he was now fully aroused.

He stroked himself, watching them kiss one another; this aroused him further, and though he was disappointed that he wouldn't be able to kiss Katze, he could understand why they wanted to preserve this intimacy for themselves.

Now Katze broke away. "This is what I'd do to you, if I could," he whispered, then turned and walked toward Riki.

His heart pounding, Riki gasped as Katze began kissing and biting his neck, his hand finding his engorged organ and stroking him slowly. Then he dropped down to his knees and began tasting him with his tongue, swirling around the head and up and down the shaft.

"Oh fuck," Riki moaned.

Then Katze took him into his mouth, all the way down his throat.

"Fucking Jupiter," Riki cried. "Hey! Katze! I'm not going to last long if you keep...doing that."

Katze released him, considering. "Maybe we should go ahead and start." He turned to Daryl. "Are you ready, love?"

"Yes." Barely audible, Daryl was trembling from excitement and nervousness.

"Then come over here." Katze lay on the bed, holding his arms out to him. Daryl approached him and lay on top of him for a few minutes while they kissed. "Now, straddle me, on your hands and knees. He's going to come up behind you."

Daryl obeyed and Riki approached them, excited but a little hesitant about fucking a virgin. It was actually something he had never done before. He got up on the bed, positioning himself behind Daryl on his knees, and pressing himself up to his portal.

"Bend down here and kiss me," Katze commanded, and Daryl did so; Riki moaned a little when this movement made the view all the more enticing. Although the scars on Daryl's back were a little disconcerting, the boy had a beautiful firm ass and gorgeous legs. He ran his hands up and down his hips and thighs and then spread him apart. Bending down, he pleased his portal with his tongue, swirling it around and then thrusting it inside him.

Daryl gasped.

"What's he doing?" Katze whispered.

"Licking me...like you did."

"I really...need to fuck you now," Riki said through gritted teeth.

"Go slow," Katze instructed. "Be gentle."

With trembling fingers, Riki began penetrating, but only got the tip in when Daryl cried out.

"It's okay," Katze soothed. "It hurts like this, especially the first time, at first. But then it feels good."

"I don't think it will fit."

Riki groaned, every instinct in his body begging him to thrust hard into the tantalizingly tight sanctum. "Just a little more," he begged.

"All right," Daryl said, meekly.

The mongrel pressed in, probably a little further than he should have, and Daryl yelped from the pain. "It hurts...too much."

"Do you want to stop?" Katze asked. "It's all right if you want to."

Please, don't fucking stop, Riki thought, now desperate for deeper penetration.

"No, I don't want to stop. Wait...it feels better now. Okay."

"Just a little more, Riki," Katze said, sharply.

"I'm hardly even in at all," Riki pleaded. "Please, let me ram it in all the way."

"No! I said take it slow and gentle, or we'll stop," Katze said, harshly, then added, "after this you can fuck me as hard as you want."

Pacified with this promise, Riki was then able to be a little more patient with Daryl, inching in little by little until finally, at long last, he was fully inside him. For a few moments he just remained thus, allowing Daryl to adjust to him and relax.

"How does it feel?" Katze asked.

"It feels...interesting. It stopped hurting, pretty much."

"This is it, love. He's penetrated you. Now he's going to fuck you. Are you ready?"

“Yes.” Daryl’s eyes were shining.

“Kiss me.”

As they kissed, Riki began slowly thrusting, marveling over Daryl’s grip. “You’re so fucking tight, Daryl,” he moaned. “Ah...fuck yes.” He grabbed his hips and began pulling back as he thrust, daring to plunge a little deeper.

Daryl began gasping, a slight smile on his face. “It feels...good, Katze!”

“Can I fuck you hard now?” Riki begged.

“Uh huh,” Daryl consented.

Moaning, Riki then gave the gray-eyed virgin an A-class fucking, mongrel style, relishing the incredible tightness. It was simply too exquisite to last long. “Oh fuck...I’m gonna come...I can’t wait...fuck yesss!” Releasing his essence with a loud moan, Riki slowly withdrew, then slid to the floor at the edge of the bed.

Daryl and Katze were enjoying a few minutes of intimacy, kissing almost violently, and rolling around on the bed. Riki shook his head, wondering what it would be like to have no closure to sex, no release to give a definitive end to a lovemaking session.

“So, you’ve been fucked. Did you like it?” Katze smiled.

“Not at first, but then later, yes. Very much. Thank you Katze.”

“How about thanking me?” Riki piped up from the floor.

Laughing, Daryl and Katze both thanked the mongrel.

“Don’t forget, you promised me a good fucking,” Riki reminded Katze. “And I’m gonna fuck you hard, too.”

Katze smiled. “I haven’t forgotten. I’m ready when you are.”

“I might be a few minutes,” Riki confessed.

* * *

Iason was in the middle of a conference call when he noticed the light flashing on his wrist-terminal. He squinted at it, not quite believing what he was seeing. According to the message relayed from the main terminal, someone had hacked into the programming center for Riki’s pet ring and removed the release

restriction. As soon as he could, he excused himself from the call and immediately headed home.

As he drove, he found himself growing more and more furious as he began mapping out the possibilities as to what was going on. Of course, he could reprogram the restriction from his wrist-terminal, but he had other plans. He wanted to surprise his pet and his accomplice and find out what they were up to. He hoped it was something as simple as his pet wanting to masturbate and convincing Daryl to somehow get into the system to remove his restriction. Of course, they would both be punished. But there were other scenarios he envisioned that—if they were true—well...he just hoped they weren't true.

* * *

“You look like you're ready now,” Katze laughed.

Riki was stroking a massive erection, watching them. “You two are hot together,” he said. “You sure can kiss a long time.”

“We like kissing,” Daryl said.

“I can tell.” Riki gazed at Katze, smiling a naughty smile. “Lie facedown the bed, Katze. It's time to get fucked.”

Grinning, Katze obeyed, and Riki immediately moved on top of him, running his hands up and down his beautiful body. “You're so fucking gorgeous,” he whispered. “Spread your legs apart more.”

As Katze did so, Riki spread him with his hands, pressing his engorged organ up to his portal and penetrating slightly. “I'm gonna ram it in now,” he warned, then plunged with all his strength.

Katze cried out.

“You're hurting him!” Daryl shouted.

“It's okay, love. It feels good already.”

“It does?”

“Yeah, it...really does.”

Riki fucked him hard, thrilled to finally be taking Katze, who he had lusted after for over two years. “Oh yeah...Katze...fuck yes...you're so hot.” And though Katze wasn't as tight as Daryl, he

was more stimulating to Riki, who had fantasized about him countless times. “Fuck yeah...oh yeah...yessss...oh fuck! Katze!”

Just as Riki cried out his ecstasy, Daryl suddenly stood up, a look of total terror on his face. “Master Iason!”

Turning, Riki and Katze both gazed in horror at the doorway, where Iason stood, his eyes wild with fury, his face so contorted with rage he almost looked like someone else.

“Oh shit,” Riki whispered.

Iason's Wrath

For what seemed like an eternity, the three of them stared in horror, hearts pounding, at Iason, who seemed to grow in size as he gazed at each one of them, his face dark with fury. Riki immediately withdrew from Katze, who scrambled to sit up.

“My eyes...must deceive me!” Iason finally bellowed, his voice booming so loud that Daryl covered his ears in alarm. The Blondie was beside himself with rage and hurt, unable to believe what he had just witnessed. When he had entered the penthouse and heard Riki’s unmistakable sex moans, he had been so shocked that he had been rendered speechless, and had stood at the door for some moments before he was even noticed. The sight of his pet taking another man—and Katze, at that— was like hurling a knife into his heart, Riki’s praises of Katze twisting the knife mercilessly. It was nothing less than impossible. His pet, however unruly, surely couldn’t betray him in such a fashion, and with two Furniture...it was...unconceivable. And for Katze and Daryl, both of whom he trusted, to take such egregious liberties with his pet...to deliberately remove his ring restrictions...it was more than he could bear.

“Is this how all my leniency is to be repaid? Through this kind of betrayal?” His voice shaking, he started for Katze.

“This is my fault!” Riki exclaimed, stepping in front of Katze, who watched the approaching Blondie with a look of dread and resignation.

Shoving Riki aside firmly—though not making eye contact with his pet—Iason now towered over Katze. Grabbing his hair, he raised him to his feet. “You, Katze? You...would betray me?”

“Iason. I’m...truly sorry. I—”

“Silence!” Iason struck him, hard, across the face, then lifted him up and threw him against the wall so hard that Katze was stunned for a moment. The Blondie picked him up again and hurled him across the room, sending him flying into the T-stand. This time Katze cried out in agony, the pain in his side telling him he had undoubtedly broken some ribs.

“Katze!” Daryl cried, running to his lover’s side.

“Daryl! Move aside!”

“Please, Master Iason, please don’t kill him,” Daryl begged.

“I said...move aside.” His voice low and menacing, Iason walked toward them.

As soon as Iason had thrown Katze against the wall, Riki had run from the room, and now returned with the taming stick. “I’m ready to be punished, Master Iason,” he said, loudly.

Iason turned to see his pet holding out the taming stick, his head bowed, eyes down, in a position of submission—one that his pet had never before taken. It was the first thing he’d seen since he’d arrived that pacified his anger, however slightly. For his pet to bring him the hated taming stick in such a way, acknowledging the punishment that he’d earned, evidenced at least the smallest glimmer of obedience. And he had called him Master.

He turned to Daryl and Katze, who were huddled on the floor, Katze in obvious pain, blood streaming down his face. “Stay where you are,” he commanded. “I’m not finished with either of you.”

Then he strode toward his pet, taking the taming stick and pulling Riki’s head back by the hair, his face close to his pet’s. “You think you’re ready to be punished, do you? I don’t think you are, pet. I don’t think you could possibly be ready for what’s coming. Oh, I’ll tame you. But I doubt you fully appreciate how much it’s going to hurt.”

“Iason, please...don’t hurt Katze and Daryl. This was all my doing.”

“How very gallant of you, pet,” Iason replied, with a soft laugh. “But they are both going to be dealt with as I see fit.”

“But it was—”

“Hush!” Now Iason flipped his pet around and threw him against the wall, pinning his wrists over his head with one hand. “Get ready for the taming of your life, pet,” he said sharply, then, whipping his arm back, commenced with the most brutal caning he had ever given, and his pet had ever endured. His cloak whirling as his arm came flying back again and again, the fury of the beautiful Blondie was glorious and unrelenting—his expressions hardened by rage, his hair swinging in golden arcs, his eyes glimmering an angry sapphire. Iason’s strength was betrayed by his pet’s anguished cries, the Blondie’s body shaking from the impact of each strike. Daryl and Katze watched in horror and despair, clutching one another. Katze was beside himself with remorse for suggesting the now ill-fated plan, Riki’s every cry a torment to him—and he was consumed with worry about what Iason would do to his beloved Daryl.

Riki’s suffering was beyond anything Iason had ever done to him thus far, and his Blondie master wouldn’t stop, punishing strike after strike hitting his buttocks and thighs. He now fully appreciated the utter stupidity of their threesome. What had made them think they could do anything without Iason discovering them? He didn’t know how his master had done it, but somehow Iason had figured out what they were up to. His unexpected arrival at precisely that moment could not have been a mere coincidence. In his desperation to escape Iason’s wrath, he was trying to achieve a state of transcendence, to remove himself somehow from the pain that was overwhelming his entire state of being. He was simply unable to do so, although he was now so disoriented that he had fallen silent.

Iason finally ceased when Riki stopped crying out, then dragged him over to the T-stand and cuffed him in roughly, slamming the cuffs closed with a fist. “I’m not finished with you yet,” he warned.

Then he turned back to Katze and Daryl. Katze looked to be in severe pain. Iason considered him for a moment, trying to decide if he’d been adequately punished. His anger had dissipated somewhat

and his head was a little cooler, though he was still furious. He realized now that his pet had probably prevented his killing or seriously hurting Katze; had he not intervened, Katze would probably be lying motionless on the floor. From the way Katze held his side, Iason could see he was suffering. He decided that perhaps he'd been sufficiently punished; he didn't truly want to kill his most important player in the underground Black Market.

"Daryl. Your turn. Go bring me the G-strap."

"Yes Iason-sama," Daryl said softly, obeying the Blondie's command meekly.

As he left, Iason and Katze gazed at one another. "I trusted you," the Blondie said, finally.

"I wasn't...thinking. All I cared about...was giving Daryl an experience...I couldn't." Katze spoke in broken gasps, as though he was having trouble breathing.

Iason's brow wrinkled at this, as though he didn't comprehend what Katze was getting at. "The one I saw my pet taking wasn't Daryl. It was you."

Katze nodded, sighing. "I promised Riki...that is...." Now Katze's voice trailed off as he realized he was probably giving Iason additional information best left unsaid.

"You promised Riki what?" Iason said sharply. "Was my pet with Daryl, too?"

Katze, now realizing that this fact hadn't been obvious to the Blondie, fell silent, glancing over at Riki, who shook his head at him vigorously.

Whipping around, Iason caught his pet in the act of signaling Katze and with a few quick steps reached him. He grabbed Riki's hair, pulling his head back, and—after removing his glove with his teeth—struck him hard across the face. "Didn't you learn anything from that taming? How dare you encourage him to lie to me!" After striking him a few more times, he turned around.

Daryl had returned with the G-strap and held it out with trembling hands.

The Blondie removed his cloak, tossing it aside angrily, before he took the G-strap. He had already broken out into a fearsome sweat. "So. You were with Riki, too?"

Bowing his head, Daryl answered quietly, "Yes, Master Iason."

"And I suppose you were the one to remove the restrictions on his pet ring?"

"Yes."

Iason, while still angry, couldn't help but be impressed with Daryl's ability to hack into the ring program. He would have to think about how to better utilize his abilities in the future. But for the moment, such considerations were far from foremost in his mind.

"Unfortunately for you, I am immediately notified of any tampering to the program," he said, holding up his arm to indicate his wrist-terminal.

"Fuck," Riki breathed, now understanding why Iason had come home.

"Daryl. Lie facedown on the bed." With a sharp flip of his wrist, Iason activated the G-strap with an intimidating crack. The golden neon-like aura surrounded the strap, buzzing and humming with the slightest movement.

Daryl obeyed, his eyes meeting Katze's as he moved toward the bed. He gave a small smile of reassurance to his lover, who looked about ready to cry. Climbing onto the bed, he quietly awaited his punishment, without resistance or argument.

Now Iason moved over to the side of the bed and just stood there, flicking the strap in a manner designed to terrorize the unruly youth. "What you have done is unspeakable. For a Furniture to pair with a master's pet is simply beyond my comprehension. Have you any idea what would happen to you if I reported this to Jupiter? And to deliberately defy my authority and alter my command sequence, to remove restrictions that were specifically enabled for punishment—for this action alone, you deserve a thorough strapping."

"Yes, Master Iason. I deserve it, just as you say."

“Good. Then you know your punishment is going to be severe.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Iason stood there for a moment, flipping the G-strap with increasing violence, the sharp, menacing snaps hinting that punishment was imminent. While he was pleased with Daryl for submitting fully to his punishment and acknowledging his transgressions, he wasn't going to spare him when it came to his arm. No, Daryl was going to have to suffer, just as Riki had suffered.

He raised his arm, and then, twisting his body to increase the velocity of his strike, brought the strap down on his backside full force with a deafening crack, eliciting an involuntary wince from Daryl, who was desperately trying not to cry out for Katze's sake. But his efforts soon proved futile; Iason strapped him brutally, mercilessly, and eventually his tormented cries filled the room.

Katze sat with his head in his hands, consumed with guilt and regret, the sound of his lover's anguish more than he could bear. His concern for Daryl outweighed his own pain which, in truth, was quite considerable—Katze knew that something was desperately wrong inside his chest. His tears betrayed his misery and he wept openly, longing to gather Daryl up into his arms. He was furious with himself for initiating the encounter with Iason's pet, now fully cognizant of the peril he had put them all in—he who, more than anyone, knew the terrifying extent of Iason's wrath when the Blondie was provoked. It was a plan that had gone desperately wrong, and he had known even before approaching Riki that if Iason found out, the consequences would be dire, yet in his preoccupation with pleasuring Daryl he had been overconfident in their ability to pull it off. Why had he not considered the possibility that Iason had programmed the main terminal to report unauthorized access? He knew Iason wore the wrist-terminal. It was an unbelievably stupid mistake. More than that, the whole affair was a mistake—now it seemed absurd that any of them had even considered it.

Riki was smarting from his taming and already was uncomfortable in the T-stand. He watched Daryl's strapping with

despair and a feeling of helplessness. It was excruciating to see him suffer, to hear his agony—Daryl who was so gentle and helpful, who had never uttered a harsh word to Riki since the day he first arrived at the penthouse. The dark-haired mongrel felt responsible; he would never again underestimate his Blondie master, who seemed to be almost omniscient, would never again assume that anything could be hidden from him. Katze's anguish was almost as heart-wrenching as Daryl's cries; Riki had never seen the handsome auburn-haired leader of the underground Black Market weep before.

By the time Iason finished the strapping, Daryl was sobbing, reddened strap marks covering his backside from his back down to his thighs. Snapping off the G-strap, Iason stood for a moment, watching Daryl's misery with satisfaction. With difficulty, the punished youth struggled to regain his composure, worried when he saw Iason turn to Katze.

"Master Iason," he pleaded, "may I please take Katze to the medical center? His...his ribs are broken, I think."

The Blondie appraised Katze for a moment, then knelt down, pressing his hand against his sides. Katze winced, trying not to betray his fear of the Blondie whose hands were now on his body, touching areas that were extremely painful.

Iason rose to his feet. "You may take him," he said, with a sharp nod. He suspected that Daryl was right; Katze no doubt had several broken ribs—possibly a punctured lung.

"Thank you, Iason-sama," Daryl said, relieved. He rushed over to Katze, helping him dress. "Let's just forget the shirt," he suggested, when it became clear Katze could hardly move his upper body.

Now the Blondie approached his pet, who watched him with dread. "You are...no doubt feeling a little uncomfortable, I trust?"

"Yes," Riki answered, weakly.

"The night's only beginning. I've been thinking, Riki, and it seems no matter how I punish you, I turn around and you've disobeyed me yet again. It appears I need to rethink how best to punish you. So tonight...I have something special in mind." With a

little smile, the Blondie leaned in to whisper in his ear. "I'm quite sure you won't enjoy it."

Then, without further comment, Iason left the room. Katze and Daryl were dressed and anxious to leave, but Katze was having difficulty walking.

"Hey," Riki said. "I'm...so sorry. Fuck. I'm a total idiot."

"Not...your fault," Katze said through labored breaths. "My idea."

"You'd better get outta here, before he changes his mind and wants to fuck you up some more."

Katze nodded, putting his arm around Daryl, who helped him walk.

"Well...it was fun, Riki," Daryl said, with uncharacteristic humor, eliciting a painful laugh from Katze.

"Fuck...don't make me laugh."

"Go," Riki whispered, suddenly feeling an overwhelming urge to laugh, too, and knowing that would be disastrous if Iason happened upon his mirth.

"You're gonna need...that sense of...humor," Katze said, winking, though his eyes conveyed his sympathy for Riki's night ahead.

Riki nodded. He didn't know what Iason had in mind, but he knew that this wasn't one of those punishment sessions that he found arousing in the least. This was hardcore discipline with one view in mind: his absolute suffering. And yet, he had been tamed so hard that he was now flooded with a rush of natural opiates, which accounted for his elevated mood and urge to laugh. He actually felt, for the moment, almost good, and he wondered how long it would last.

What was Iason up to? He was obviously talking to someone; Riki could hear his voice, but it was so low and soft he couldn't make out what he was saying.

Now that Katze and Daryl were gone, he would be the sole target for Iason's fury. Although he was glad the lovers had escaped further pain at the hands of the Blondie, he was at present feeling

not a little apprehensive about what his enraged master had in mind for his “special” punishment.

Iason seemed to be gone an eternity, and Riki’s transient relief from his body’s opiates had dissipated, leaving him sore and aching, every muscle in his body feeling the torture of the T-stand. Without even intending to, he began moaning, closing his eyes in an attempt to escape the reality of his situation.

When he opened his eyes, Iason was standing before him, an inexplicable look on his face. Now he grabbed his hair and pulled his head back once again. “Why, Riki?” he whispered, his voice harsh and thick with emotion. “Why would you do such a thing? And with...Katze and Daryl?”

“I...I was just trying to...help them.”

“Help them. Oh...let me guess. They’re lovers but can’t pair, so you’re posing as a knight to help them by proxy?”

Riki’s eyes opened with surprise. “Yes, fuck...that’s fucking exactly it.”

“So what you were doing, you did out of nobility, is that it? And when you told Katze how hot he was, how good he felt, that was your way of closing the spaces between them?” His voice now shaking with anger, the Blondie pressed himself closer to his pet’s face.

“That was...just physical. Like how it is with you and Raoul.”

The Blondie laughed softly. “Interesting that you should mention Raoul. In fact, he will be here momentarily.”

Riki blinked, horrified. Why would Raoul be coming over...now?

“Yes, I thought that might get a reaction out of you. I told you I had something special planned tonight. Given your particular fondness for Raoul, I’ve decided it would be a nice touch if he administered the discipline. I have quite an agenda planned. Would you like to know what’s coming or do you prefer surprises?”

The mongrel gasped a few times, trying to catch his breath. “No,” he said, shaking his head. “You...wouldn’t do that.”

“Wouldn’t I? Just like you wouldn’t take Daryl and Katze on a whim?” He laughed again. “Personally, I’m partial to surprises. So I think we’ll just do it that way. It should be quite entertaining...for Raoul and I, at any rate. I must say, Raoul seemed especially pleased—eager, more accurately—to be invited to participate in your taming. He has a penchant for discipline, apparently—especially spankings, and since I know how much you enjoy those, too, I thought that would work out rather nicely. Oh...now I’ve gone and spoiled the first surprise.”

Trembling, Riki listened to his master’s terrifying prelude to discipline, knowing all too well that these weren’t empty threats. He was trying to prepare himself for more pain, but at the moment he was so frightened at the prospect of Raoul administering the punishment that he actually began crying.

“Oh,” Iason breathed, gently licking a tear from his face, “crying already? You won’t have tears left, pet, before the night’s through.” Now he leaned in close to whisper into his ear, his voice shaking with emotion. “I want you to feel the pain I felt when I came in here and saw you taking Katze. The only way I can achieve that, I think, is through a night of punishment specially tailored for you. I’m going to drive obedience into you tonight, however long it takes.”

The sound of the door interrupted Iason’s monologue. “Ah. Here he is now,” Iason said, his lip curling in an almost sinister smile as he left the room.

Feeling his face flush hot, Riki steeled himself for an experience he would now give anything to avoid. When Iason entered the room with Raoul, he could not even raise his head to look at them.

Iason grabbed his chin, forcing his attention. “Pet. Raoul has graciously agreed to administer the punishment tonight; I’ve explained to him our little situation, so he knows the severity of discipline required.”

Riki’s eyes met Raoul’s, flashing darkly when he apprehended the Blondie’s gloating smile and look of absolute triumph and

excitement. Graciously agreed? Fucking Raoul. He was practically foaming at the mouth.

“So, Raoul, I leave him in your hands. Shall I release him?”

“Yes,” Raoul said. “I want him over my knee.”

“You’re leaving?” Riki said, fearfully.

“Figure of speech, pet. No, I’ll be watching, to be sure. I don’t want to miss a thing.” Iason uncuffed him, propping up his body when he fell limply upon being released.

Riki felt Raoul’s strong hands brusquely lift him up and hoist him over his shoulder, then take him over to the bed. He sat down on the edge, repositioning him over his knees.

Noting the evidence of extensive punishment caused by the taming stick, he nodded his approval. “Nicely done, Iason.”

“Thank you. I was rather pleased myself.”

“It’s going to make my job a lot easier.”

“Please, Iason,” Riki pleaded. “Please...don’t do this. Don’t let him...hurt me.”

“Not open for negotiation, pet,” Iason replied, firmly.

Despite himself, Riki was shaking in pure terror to find himself bent over the knee of his nemesis and knowing that the Blondie had just been given license to punish him severely.

“How cute. The little punk is shaking.” Raoul laughed. He bent down, speaking in a low voice. “You should be shaking, after what you did. I personally can’t believe it could possibly be true. But Iason assures me it is, and so, here we are. And now you’re going to be punished—like you’ve never been punished before.”

With that, Raoul brought his hand down with a strike so hard that Riki screamed, his tender flesh traumatized by the additional punishment. Thus commenced the spanking at the hand of the Raoul, an experience so terrible that Riki felt that he wanted to die. Pleading and crying, he begged unsuccessfully for a termination to the brutal spanking, imploring Iason, who watched him suffer, his own face expressionless. For Raoul, spanking Riki was one of the most satisfying moments of his life, and he savored every cry, every scream, every desperate wiggle he made as Riki attempted to escape

the Blondie's punishment. The experience was intensely sexually arousing. He would have been content to go on spanking the mongrel forever, perhaps even spanking him to death, if that were possible. But eventually, Iason raised his hand. "That's enough," he said quietly, as Riki sobbed inconsolably on Raoul's knee.

"Where next?" Raoul asked.

"The great hall. I'll sit in the chair."

Picking him up firmly and setting him on his feet, Raoul got up, then led him by his hair roughly into the great hall. Confused, Riki looked to Iason for an explanation, but the Blondie said nothing, simply going to his favorite chair and sitting down in it, crossing his legs with disconcerting nonchalance. Then Raoul pushed him toward Iason, and Riki stopped, uncertain of what was wanted.

"Put your hands on the chair, Riki," Iason said, motioning to the arms of the chair. The mongrel did so, surprised when Iason put his own hands over his, as though pinning him down. Then, he felt Raoul pulling his hips back and suddenly comprehended what was going on.

"Please, Iason," he begged in an urgent whisper. "Don't do this. Not him. Please!"

"Hush, pet." Iason watched his face as Raoul positioned him and then, with absolutely no warning or preparation, plunged fully into the exposed mongrel.

Riki cried out in complete anguish; even Iason had never hurt this much. And to know it was Raoul made the rape all the more punishing.

Raoul was beside himself with utter delight, moaning loudly from the very start. His eyes nearly rolled back in his head when he felt how tight he was—no wonder Iason had developed a taste for taking the mongrel. He was, in fact, so tight that he wasn't even sure he could fit completely inside him, but he forced himself in anyway. He groaned, closing his eyes.

"Oh, Iason," he gasped. "He's so tight."

Riki's cries sent shudders down his back, and the fact that Iason had commissioned the entire project was simply unbelievable.

The call he had received from Iason earlier that evening had been one of the most surprising events of his life. He and Iason had barely been on speaking terms since their night together, and then for Iason to suggest he punish Riki—it was almost surreal. He began to wonder if he was even lucid—maybe he was actively fantasizing. Spanking Riki had been an experience beyond his wildest dreams and it had aroused him so intensely that fucking the mongrel was nothing less than exquisite. And just to know he was hurting Iason's pet—this mongrel who he so despised—made it all the more exciting. He loved Riki's cries. He had to admit that Iason's little pet was enticing—physically tantalizing—and such an incredibly sweet fuck that he now felt a little confused regarding his own thoughts on masters and pets. He had to admit, he wouldn't mind taking Riki again...and again.

Riki hung his head, unable to look into the eyes of his Blondie master so close to him, tears now streaming down his already tear-stained face.

"This won't be the last time I have Raoul come here to discipline you, if you continue with your tiresome disobedience, pet," Iason whispered, calmly. "I see now that I've been too gentle with you. I think, after tonight, you may think twice about disobeying me. I can see you think I'm being cruel. But I'm determined to punish you until you fully regret taking Katze and Daryl."

"I do...fully regret it," Riki pleaded.

"Not yet," Iason said, softly. "But you will."

Raoul was so stimulated that he quickly ascended to his peak, grunting with each thrust, and then, suddenly, releasing his essence with a broken groan. He withdrew, smiling at Iason, who nodded almost imperceptibly, releasing his pet's hands. Riki was still crying, his head hanging low.

Now Iason stood up. "Sit here," he commanded, placing his pet firmly in the chair.

The mongrel wiped his tears, trying to regain his composure, wondering what was going to happen next. When Raoul began

kissing Iason, passionately, he felt stabs of dark jealousy turn his stomach. Surely...they weren't going to make him...watch.

When Raoul began undressing Iason, his heart sank. He tried to look away, but found that he could not. Iason closed his eyes and threw back his head as Raoul began kissing and biting his throat, obviously in exactly the way he liked it best, his lips parting with a little moan. Now Raoul's hands explored his body with infuriating familiarity, moving to the places that most stimulated Iason, who now leaned back against the bar, spreading his legs to increase his stability. Raoul's touch and experienced strokes elicited an immediate erection as though Iason had been wearing a pet ring. Raoul then led him close to Riki, who watched in horror as Iason grabbed the armrests of the chair in the same manner that Riki had done, his face close to the mongrel's. His legs spread wide to make himself more accessible, Iason offered himself to Raoul, who knelt and pleased his most sensitive region with his tongue.

Iason's face contorted with pleasure, his expressions unbearable to the miserable mongrel who watched in horror. His lip curled in a slight snarl—a look Riki had never seen before, and one he didn't care to see now, produced by Raoul.

“Ohhhh,” Iason breathed, then bit his lip.

The Blondie's hair brushed against his naked skin, and his every gasp and moan was forced upon him, tormenting him with Iason's pleasure.

Iason opened his eyes, which shone with lust and pleasure, and looked directly at his pet. “What do you think of this punishment, pet?” he whispered.

“It fucking sucks,” Riki said in an anguished voice. “Please stop it.”

“Oh no,” Iason said, then moaned, closing his eyes for a moment. “No. Not until we're finished.”

Moaning again, Iason threw his head back, wiggling a bit against Raoul's mouth for more stimulation.

“Right there!” he cried suddenly, then began gasping.

Riki felt like he was going out of his mind. He fucking wanted to kill Raoul. And at this point he was pretty pissed with Iason, too. This was absolute torture—even worse than the physical punishment.

Now Iason straightened up, almost urgently, and Raoul moved in front of him, his back pressed up against the chair. Riki pulled up his legs so there could be no chance of his touching the man who he hated more than anyone in the world. Raoul began pleasuring Iason, first with his tongue and then taking him into his mouth, apparently in exactly the manner Iason wanted from the sound of the Blondie's sighs and gasps. Iason spread his feet apart a little more, thrusting himself toward Raoul as if offering himself more fully. His hands rested on Raoul's head, stroking his hair, then holding him.

"That's it...perfect, Raoul," he whispered, closing his eyes.

Riki bristled with these words, his jealousy now consuming him.

"Raoul...you're so...hot." As Iason said this last word, he looked directly at Riki, and the mongrel had a faint recollection that he had said something similar to Katze, right before Iason walked in.

Iason threw his head back with a spine-chilling moan. Raoul ran his hands up his body, knowing from his partner's cues that he was about to climax. Riki knew, too, and watched darkly as his master's face contorted with pleasure and he gasped, and then, grabbing Raoul's hair, cried out in the most exquisite, sexually provocative vocalization Riki had ever heard, sending shivers through him and even arousing him, despite his torment.

Stunned, he simply stared at Iason for a long moment when the Blondie opened his eyes to look at him. Wiping a tear from his face, Riki looked away.

"Thank you, Raoul, for your assistance with this," Iason said, getting dressed.

"What, are we finished?" Raoul desperately wanted to punish the mongrel some more.

“I think he’s been sufficiently punished for now. But I won’t hesitate,” now he glanced at Riki, “to call you again if I think he needs discipline.”

“Call me any time,” Raoul said, smiling. “I’m glad I could be...of service.” As he left, he gave the mongrel a parting shot that communicated his utter delight with the evening’s activities. Glaring back, Riki tried to convey his plan to torture and dismember Raoul and have his body parts scattered throughout Amoi.

Iason walked Raoul to the door, and as he came back he stopped to open a cabinet, removing Riki’s taming chains.

Sighing, the mongrel held out his hands to be cuffed, and then his feet. Iason snapped the collar around his neck and then led him to the corner of the great hall, chaining him to the post there.

So. He was to be in chains again. Riki sat down, pulling up his legs and resting his head on his arms. Suddenly, it was as though something inside him broke—he began sobbing, unable to stop. It had simply been the worst night of his life. He thought of Katze and Daryl and how they had been hurt, and then his own punishment. And worst of all—Raoul. His spanking, which had been a nightmare, and then being raped by him and forced to watch him pleasure Iason...it was all too much. And now he was back in chains, and Iason was apparently still angry with him. And all of this had happened because of his own stupidity, so he was angry with himself, too.

Iason poured himself a glass of wine and attempted to sit down and read a periodical. Riki’s weeping tugged at him, and he tried to ignore him, but he was seriously distracted by it and read the same line over and over in the periodical. His pet never cried like this after punishment—except immediately after, of course. In the end, the misery of his pet was just too much to bear. After his weeping had gone on for a good while, Iason finally got up and approached the mongrel, crouching down.

On sensing his presence, Riki startled, instinctively holding up his arm and cringing, his eyes filled with terror.

“Hush, pet,” Iason said, softly, reaching out to stroke his hair.

Relaxing at his master’s gentle touch and soothing voice, Riki looked up at him with wide eyes.

“Do you forgive me?” he asked.

Sighing, Iason stroked his cheek. “I am trying to, pet.”

“Will you...please...hold me?”

Smiling with a kindness his pet rejoiced to see, Iason unhooked his collar chain and picked him up, carrying him to the chair, where he settled down with him on his lap. Riki rested against him, sighing when Iason put his arms around him. For a long time they sat together thus, reestablishing their intimacy. Riki played with the Blondie’s hair, rubbing it between his fingers.

“I have no feelings for Katze...or Daryl,” Riki said finally. “The only one I have feelings for...is you.”

Iason’s heart beat a little faster with this declaration, and he smiled. “Are you saying you love me?”

“I’m saying,” Riki said quickly, “that what I feel for you...falls somewhere close to that, if not love exactly.”

The Blondie chuckled at his pet’s qualified answer, thrilled with his pet’s profession of almost-love.

“It...really hurt me...watching you with Raoul.”

Now Iason grew serious. “How do you think I felt, when I came upon you and Katze?”

“It couldn’t have felt the same for you. You were pissed because we were disobedient. I was hurt and jealous because I had to see you with another man.”

“What makes you think,” Iason whispered, “that I would not be hurt and jealous seeing you with Katze? Why shouldn’t I want you all to myself?”

Riki fell silent. “I...didn’t think of it like that.”

“Your problem,” Iason scolded, “is that too often you don’t think—before you act.”

The mongrel sighed. “How long are you going to keep me in chains?”

“Until I’m finished.”

Sighing again, Riki rested his head against Iason's chest. Sitting naked on Iason's lap was giving him an erection, and he tried to cover himself with his hands.

"I have told you," Iason whispered, "never to be ashamed of your arousal." He pushed Riki's hands away and began stroking him, quickly bringing his erection into full rigidity.

The mongrel moaned, desperate for release but feeling as though he was in no position to make requests. For all he knew, Iason planned to torment him all night by preventing consummation.

"Are you going to ask me?" Iason said, finally.

"I'm afraid to."

"Don't be. Tell me what you want, love."

Hearing the word "love," Riki felt relieved, realizing in that instant that everything was almost back to normal. "I want to come...in your mouth. Will you pleasure me?"

"Yes," Iason said softly, bending down to kiss him, a long, slow, exquisitely sensual kiss that dissolved all the mongrel's inhibitions.

The Blondie stood up, carrying his pet over to the bar and setting him down there, then pushing his legs apart and gazing at his masculine beauty for a moment. Then, holding his now completely engorged erection in his hand, he moved his tongue along the head, flicking it, and then took his pet partway into his mouth. Riki moaned, his hands resting on the Blondie's head, his chains hanging down into his hair, thrilled when Iason continued and took him fully into his mouth. Then, wiggling his tongue along the shaft as he withdrew, he took him in once again, gently sucking. His pet's legs hung off the bar, and he began swinging them, like a child, unaware that he was doing so, his gasps and moans betraying his utter delight at Iason's art of pleasuring. The chains jangled madly with his movement, and Iason had to suppress an urge to laugh.

"Oh...that's so good...I love you so much," Riki said, completely oblivious to the fact that he had just made a declaration of love.

Iason almost stopped what he was doing when he heard his pet's words, but he quickly dismissed the profession as something Riki didn't truly mean, at least not in the way he wanted it. His pet had earlier given him assurances of his affection, and for Iason, that was more than enough, for tonight. Still, his mind replayed the declaration over and over, and he shivered with the thrill of hearing Riki say the words he so desperately wanted to hear.

"Fuck yes. Oh yesss. Fucking...I'm coming, fuck I'm coming!" Riki then cried out his ecstasy, feeling his semen shoot into the back of the beautiful Blondie's mouth. "Oh yeah," he groaned.

Iason smiled. "Did you like that, pet?"

"Hell yes."

"Hold out your hands."

Riki did so, and Iason removed the cuffs, uncuffing his feet as well. His pet's delight at being freed was almost overwhelming—he leapt forward, kissing his master furiously on the cheek and throwing his arms around his neck.

"I'll be good," Riki promised. "I'll be so good, I swear!"

"You'd better," Iason warned, but smiled at his pet's happiness.

Thus with a kiss, there came an end to Iason's wrath. At least...for that night.

Iason's Naughty Pet

It was well after midnight, and in the shadows of the great hall Iason sat alone, brooding. He sipped a glass of wine—his third, replaying the chaos of the day in his mind. Riki had long since fallen asleep, exhausted from the ordeal of his punishment. But Iason was unable to shut down the furious workings of his mind, a thousand thoughts and images pressing into his consciousness, forcing his attention. But in the center of it all, one scene appeared again and again—Katze and Riki, pairing on his bed. He was tortured by the image and yet could not expel it from his mind. No matter how hard he tried, the scene remained, replaying in a merciless loop—his pet's excitement, the sound of his escalating arousal, his praise of Katze, and then, in a horrific finale, Riki's copulation, his moans still taunting him in exaggerated, internal echoes.

Now that his anger had subsided—or more accurately, now that he had finally buried it deep within—he was overwhelmed with a sense of hurt and betrayal. Although Riki had professed to have no feelings for Katze, Iason was deeply jealous of his pet's obvious sexual attraction to him—a man who wasn't even physically still a man, yet who had inspired such lust and excitement in his pet as to entice him into an illicit pairing, despite the obvious risks to them both. In fact, he would have been less jealous if the mongrel had admitted to loving him and but not been so enthusiastic about taking him. It was the intensity of Riki's physical intimacy with Katze that stabbed at him the most. He wanted his pet to show such regard for him...and for him alone.

And then...for Riki to profess his qualified affection for him added a confusing layer to an already complicated tier of emotions when it came to his unruly pet, who he had now come—despite his better judgment, reprimands from Jupiter, and incessant warnings from Raoul—to love. It was entirely this love that fueled his decision to keep his mongrel pet as a permanent member of his household rather than sell him after a year's amusement, as he had always done before—no, as all Blondies did. It was this love that made him forgive Riki's countless transgressions, and even this last, which had been his worst offense since coming to Tanagura. But he was terribly, deeply hurt by it.

He longed for unequivocal devotion from his beloved pet; he envied the bond that Katze and Daryl seemed to share—the fact that they would be willing to subject themselves to his wrath simply to give one another pleasure. And there was something pathetic about their sorry attempt to experience the pleasures of pairing through Riki. It was this, more than anything, that had somewhat stayed his hand against the two lovers after his anger had subsided; had they been anyone else, he would have killed them both without hesitation—although he might have done so out of pure rage had his pet not circumvented his wrath. And Katze—though he felt particularly wounded by Katze's betrayal, Iason viewed him as integral to the Syndicate; he was more than mere “old Furniture” as Raoul called him—he was now a key player in Tanagura's success.

But it was Riki's transgression—not Katze's or Daryl's—that ate away at him, burrowing deep into his soul. Iason found himself in the absurd position of being jealous of Katze—of his pet's physical attraction to him and of the intimacy Riki had shared with him. It was a jealousy so dark and deep-rooted, and so powerful, that the Blondie began to tremble as he sipped his wine, overcome with the intensity of the emotion. And then, in a moment he would never forget, he gasped softly as he felt a burning in his eyes and wiped away a curious wetness onto his shaking fingers.

Tears? Were these...tears?

Iason stared at his hand, dumbfounded. He had never cried, not once in his life. No Blondie cried. It was just not part of their genetic makeup—or so he had always presumed. He rubbed the wetness between his fingers, puzzling over it. So. This is what his love for the mongrel had done to him. Reduced him to a common Amoian. How fitting, he mused. And what would Jupiter do...if she knew of her Blondie's tears?

The door hummed open; Daryl had finally returned. He quietly entered, assuming by the darkness that everyone was in bed. When he came into the great hall and saw Iason sitting alone in the dark, he started.

"So. What were his injuries?" Iason asked.

"Four broken ribs...a fr-fractured collarbone, a punctured lung and," Daryl shifted his weight uneasily, "some internal bleeding."

"I assume they're keeping him there?"

"Yes."

The Blondie nodded. "I'll call tomorrow and take care of all the arrangements for his stay." He paused for a moment, then added, softly, "Tanagura Medical is the best facility in all of Amoi."

"Thank you, Sir," Daryl said, his expression betraying some relief at his master's reassurance.

"I want to talk to you, Daryl. Sit down."

Nervously, he sat in a nearby chair, dreading what his master had to say.

For a long moment, the Blondie said nothing, taking another sip of his wine. "What you did today...." He stopped, sighing. "Do you know, I wanted to kill Katze?"

Hanging his head, Daryl nodded. "I'm...I'm so sorry, Master Iason."

"Concerning your evening privileges—I am revoking them for one month."

Daryl looked surprised. "You mean...you're not taking them away permanently?"

"No. One month. But during that month, you are not to see Katze—he is not to come here. Is that understood?"

“Yes, Sir.”

Noting Daryl’s obvious disappointment at being prohibited from seeing Katze, he smiled. “So. It seems the two of you...are quite close?”

Eyes widening, Daryl squirmed a little in his chair, uneasy about being questioned about his intimacy with Katze. “Yes,” he whispered.

“There is no crime in that,” Iason said, softly. “But you do realize that by engaging with a registered pet, you put all your lives in jeopardy. If I went by the rules, I would report you to Jupiter. But...I think you know better than anyone...I don’t go by all the rules.”

Uncertain how to reply to this remark, Daryl simply remained silent.

Iason laughed softly. “I see. You are choosing not to confirm or deny. Yes, I realize I am somewhat culpable in all this. I have ordered you to engage in certain...acts...that are not generally done with pets, and so, in this, I perhaps played a part in your folly.”

“Master Iason...my role is to do your bidding...whatever that may be.”

Perking up at this, Iason set his wine glass down. “Is that so? What if I were to ask you to use some of your computer skills to help me with my work?”

“That...that would—of course I would help you,” Daryl stuttered.

“Then what I’m about to talk with you about must be kept in confidence.”

“Of course, Sir.”

“Well then. Suppose I gave you the coordinates for a certain planet in our galaxy. Would you be able to...get into their global defense systems and, say, determine what sort of weapons they were developing?”

“You want me to hack into classified security channels?”

“Could you do it?”

The grey-eyed youth considered it for a moment. "I could try," he said, finally.

Iason laughed. "You look like you have something to say."

"Forgive me, Master Iason, but why would such information interest you?"

"What interests me is doing business with Alpha Zen, and they are on the cusp of developing an expansive defense system. Knowing what's in the pipeline could help us provide exactly the right package of technology to meet their needs and close the business deal."

"But...wouldn't it be better just to have Jupiter do it?"

"Of course, if Jupiter could access the system, she could find a way in. But every system in the galaxy has their security grid programmed against Jupiter's unique frequency signature. There is simply no way Jupiter could get access to the databases we're after."

Daryl nodded, falling silent for a moment. "So...would I be working for you—doing what Katze does for you?"

"What has Katze told you?" Iason said, sharply.

"Nothing. He doesn't talk about what exactly he does."

The Blondie nodded. "Good. As far as what you'd do—let's just see how this works out. We'll try a little experiment soon. That's all for now."

Surprised at being dismissed so suddenly, Daryl gave a slight bow. "Good night, Iason-sama."

"And Daryl. Bring me an Opiate-6."

"Yes, Sir." Daryl rushed to retrieve the wanted opiate, smiling as he remembered that Katze had given him one for his own pain—he was saving it for bedtime. He felt some sympathy for his Blondie master who was having headaches more and more frequently, ever since he had been poisoned by Agatha.

Iason continued to sit in the darkness for some time, his head now throbbing despite the Opiate-6. He closed his eyes and let his head fall forward, wishing for Riki's strong hands on his shoulders. Almost as if summoned by some supernatural force, his pet came

wandering into the great hall. “Why are you still up? Aren’t you coming to bed?”

“Soon, pet,” came Iason’s soft answer.

Riki stood for a moment, studying him. “Do you...have another headache?”

“A touch.”

“Want me to rub your shoulders for you?”

Iason sighed. “That would be wonderful, pet.”

“Why don’t you go lay down in the bed, then. Let’s do this properly so you can get to sleep.”

Thrilled with the prospect of receiving one of Riki’s full-body massages, Iason rose and followed his pet into the bedroom, smiling when the mongrel helped him undress as though he were a child.

“Lie down,” he commanded, and with a little smile, added, “I’ll be right back.” He went to his bedroom and retrieved the massage lotion he had purchased at the pavilion especially for this purpose—the lotion had special qualities that helped the muscles relax. He knew that Iason would love it.

When he returned with the bottle of lotion, Iason blinked, perplexed. “What is that?”

“You’ll see. Got it special just for you.”

Smiling at his pet’s mysterious manner and at his initiative in acquiring something he thought he might like, Iason soon emitted a long sigh when Riki began his magic—working out all his tension and relaxing him so exquisitely that his headache simply faded away, and then his tangled thoughts, and then, the world itself. As he drifted out of consciousness, he was aware of Riki crawling into bed with him and snuggling up close, throwing his leg over him as was his way. It was a peaceful end to what had been an extraordinarily trying day...for them both.

The next morning, he awoke to the sound of Riki’s moans.

“Somebody just fucking kill me,” his pet groaned.

“Feeling a bit sore today?” Iason couldn’t help but take a little satisfaction in his discomfort.

“I can’t fucking move. Iason—”

“Don’t even ask. The answer is no.”

“How do you even know what I was going to ask?” the mongrel demanded.

“You wanted an Opiate-6. Isn’t that so?”

“How about an Opiate-3, then?” he asked, meekly.

“No, pet.”

“How am I supposed to do anything if I can’t move?” he lamented.

“You may soak in the hot tub a bit, if it suits you.”

Riki was somewhat pacified by this. “Hell yeah it suits me. That’s the first thing I’m going to do...after breakfast.” He made as if to get up but Iason pushed him back down.

“No, that’s not the first thing you’re going to do, and neither is breakfast,” he whispered, leaning down to impart a soft kiss, guiding Riki’s hand to his erection. “I don’t care how you do it, but I want you to pleasure me before we get out of this bed.”

“But,” Riki protested, “wouldn’t it be nicer in the hot tub?”

“I can’t wait that long. I’m about ready to ejaculate. Yes...keep stroking me like that.”

“You just want me to stroke you? You don’t want—”

“Ohhh,” Iason moaned. “Riki.”

Sensing his master’s urgency, the mongrel moved down to try and provide some oral pleasure, but it was clear Iason was so aroused that the slightest movement could set him off. Slowly, he pressed his tongue to the Blondie, swirling it around the tip.

Iason reached down and grabbed his hair. “Pet,” he cried, sounding almost anguished.

With deliberate slowness, Riki took his Blondie master partway into his mouth, then began sucking as he wiggled his tongue.

“That’s it,” Iason whispered, his voice thick with pleasure. He thrust his pelvis up a bit and grabbed Riki’s hair a little tighter. “Perfect,” he murmured, biting his lip.

Then, arching his back, he began gasping. He closed his eyes and unleashed a long moan that quickly escalated into a cry of

release. Suddenly, he pulled Riki's head back so that as he erupted, he could see his essence arc onto his pet's lips. Riki explored the semen with his tongue, sending chills through Iason, whose eyes gleamed as he watched his pet lick up his sex. "Good boy," he whispered, then, after closing his eyes for a few moments and sighing, added, "Now. What does my pet want?"

"Your pet fucking wants breakfast," came Riki's saucy reply.

"Shall I spank you first, you naughty mongrel?"

"Please, I'd rather prefer if you didn't."

"Pet. I did not make an offer you had the right to refuse. If I want you to copulate, you will do so." He pushed Riki onto the bed and began stroking him, activating the pet-ring that brought him into full arousal in a manner of minutes.

Now much more interested in the project, Riki spread his legs apart a little more, thrusting up into Iason's hand with a moan.

Iason smiled, bending over to kiss him on the neck. "Feeling more like cooperating now?"

"Yeah, I wanna come," Riki breathed, his eyes shining with lust.

"Shall I continue like this?" He moved his hand with sensual strokes, relishing his pet's gasps and tiny thrusts.

"Faster...and then lick me a little...I wanna come just almost in your mouth, like we just did."

The Blondie increased his pace, moving down to add his tongue to the stimulation.

"Yeah...like that," Riki moaned, excited. "Just pump it and keep—oh, fuck, yeah. That's it. Ohhh...that's good. Suck me...just a little."

Iason complied, running his tongue along his head as he took his pet into his mouth, sucking slowly.

"Ahh...fuck yeah." Riki grabbed his master's hair and pulled his head back, moaning as his semen pumped out onto Iason's lips and outstretched tongue. "Holy shit," he breathed, his eyes rolling back with ecstasy.

Having released his pent-up essence, he fell back on the bed, groaning a little from his soreness.

“Did my pet like that?” the Blondie asked, softly.

“Fuck yes,” Riki admitted, sighing. “But now can I please have some breakfast?”

Iason bent down and kissed his nose. “You’re such a little mongrel.”

“Yeah? Well...you’re...such a Blondie. An evil, cruel Blondie.”

“Pets with bruises should take caution before insulting their masters,” Iason advised.

“Whatever,” Riki mumbled.

Now the Blondie reached down and took hold of his chin. “Don’t tell me you’re on the path of disobedience today, pet? After everything that happened yesterday?”

His pet sighed in response.

Iason leaned close to him. “Would you like me to call Raoul again?”

“No!” Riki cried in alarm, sitting up.

The Blondie laughed softly. “Then I suggest you show a little more respect.”

“It’s hard to be respectful when my blood sugar’s fucking on empty,” his pet replied.

“I’m waiting.”

“Oh, fuck. Okay. You win. Master Iason, may I please have my breakfast now?”

“Yes pet, you may,” Iason promptly replied, kissing him on the cheek.

The next few days passed in a kind of strained peacefulness. Though master and pet had both forgiven one another, each was suffering from the hurt inflicted by the other, wounds that went deep, and that seemed to fester rather than heal.

* * *

Iason was sleeping. Riki had been watching him for nearly an hour, unable to take his eyes off the beautiful Blondie lying naked his bed, hair sprawled everywhere in silken tangles, his beautiful

face peacefully serene. He found something mesmerizing about the sight of his Blondie master so vulnerable, something comforting about the slow rise and fall of his chest, the slight twitching of his fingers. Slowly, he pulled the sheets from Iason's body so he could take in his nude form. Shivering, he marveled over Iason's physical beauty: his perfectly sculpted upper body—his muscular, though not overly bulky, arms and broad chest—his narrow waist and stunningly defined abs, the tantalizing V-hollow of his pelvic region, his gorgeous, well developed—yet lean—long legs. And his...manhood, though now relaxed, still intoxicatingly perfect, its impressive size evident even in his sleeping state. The Blondie, while boasting the most beautiful mane of hair he had ever seen, seemed to have little body hair, his skin a silky-smooth porcelain softness that begged to be touched. And Iason's face, so exquisitely chiseled into pleasing proportions, was breathtaking, his arched eyebrows and long lashes empowering him with an almost feminine beauty that, when paired with his incontrovertible masculinity and virility, produced an extraordinary result: a face that turned heads, that got hearts pounding, that provoked an unequivocal response. Iason Mink was, in short, stunning.

Riki reached down and began stroking himself slowly, expelling a long-held breath, having developed an erection just looking at Iason's sleeping form. The Blondie stirred and then turned over onto his stomach, unconsciously presenting himself openly for his pet's viewing pleasure, his firm, enticingly curved buttocks inviting further scrutiny. His mouth open now as his breathing quickened, Riki's eyes followed the line of the Blondie's body from the curve of his back to the rise of his buttocks, and then the long lines of his thighs.

He was now painfully aroused, so engorged that it was all he could do to keep from moaning. The dark-haired, dark-eyed mongrel bit his lip, spreading his legs apart a little more as he began masturbating with more defined purpose. As his lust escalated, he became consumed with one desire, and one desire only—to take Iason. At that moment, while Iason slept, he was no longer his

Blondie master. He was simply a gorgeous man lying naked in his bed, and Riki, feeling unusually bold, decided he was going to fuck him.

His lust fueling his resolve, Riki straddled the Blondie, and, with shaking fingers, quickly penetrated him. Iason immediately woke up with a start and Riki pressed down on his back with all his strength, fucking all the while as fast and hard as he could.

Disoriented, Iason turned as if to buck him off, but Riki grabbed his hair and pulled his head back, wrapping the blonde hair around his arm.

“Don’t fucking move,” he commanded.

Iason, now more awake, was surprised and then amused by his pet’s boldness. “Pet. I’m going to take you over my knee and give you the spanking of your life,” he warned.

“Not until I finish fucking you,” came the mongrel’s saucy reply.

The Blondie could easily overcome his pet at any time, but was delighting in Riki’s naughtiness, and so allowed his pet to continue his conquest. He was quickly becoming aroused himself, and began to plan what he would do to the mongrel.

Sensing that Iason was allowing him to complete his objective, Riki slowed his pace a little, now undulating erotically as he took his master with deliberate strokes. He closed his eyes, moaning, relishing the twitches and contractions of the Blondie’s anal grip.

“Ohhh,” he moaned. “Oh yeah. That’s good, Iason...I’m gonna...oh fuck...fuck yes...oh yesss.” Eyes rolling back in his head, the mongrel surrendered his essence into the tight embrace of his Blondie master, voicing his ecstasy with a long, low groan.

Waiting a moment for his pet to fully enjoy his copulation, Iason suddenly moved, easily turning and pinning Riki down on the bed.

“What a naughty pet you are,” he whispered, leaning down to claim a kiss, prodding the mongrel’s mouth open with his own and exploring him hungrily with his tongue. “I hope you realize what happens to pets who take their masters while they’re sleeping. It’s quite a serious offense.”

“Well...it was fucking worth it.”

“Oh? Let’s see.” Now Iason sat up, pulling Riki over his knee. “I warned you... now you’re getting that spanking I promised.” Bringing his hand down with a sharp smack, he smiled when Riki cried out, annoyed.

“Hey! Dammit, Iason!”

The Blondie spanked him again, this time harder.

“Ow—hey! That fucking hurt!”

“Spankings are supposed to hurt, pet.” He struck him again, enjoying Riki’s protestations.

“I didn’t think you were fucking serious,” he complained. “Ow! Fuck!”

“Have I ever made false threats?” This time Iason spanked him full force, like he would if he was seriously punishing his pet.

Riki reacted to this with a yelp of pain. “Shit, Iason. You’d better fucking not spank me for real.”

Iason leaned close to his pet. “You’re in no position to issue commands. And just to show you who’s the master and who’s the pet, I think a sound spanking is in order.” With that, he proceeded to administer a thorough spanking—not as brutal as he was capable of, but certainly one that hurt— delighting in his pet’s squirms and cries.

“Please,” Riki pleaded, “oh fuck! I’m sorry, Iason!”

“Now I’m spanking you just because I want to. You’re not crying out loud enough, so I’m going to take things up a notch.” With that, Iason spanked his pet even harder, eliciting tears of anguish from the punished mongrel. Riki’s bottom grew red from his relentless hand, a sight the Blondie found extremely stimulating.

Finally, he stopped, just staring down at his pet, who was sniffing rather pathetically, still bent over his knee.

“Now pet,” Iason said, “it’s time for some serious fucking.” With that, he lifted the mongrel and set him on his feet, pushing his legs apart with his foot.

“Bend over,” he instructed. For a moment, the Blondie simply enjoyed the sight of his pet bent over, hands on his thighs, his

bottom still red and hot from his spanking. Guiding his ready member into the mongrel's portal, Iason grabbed his pet's wrists and held his arms back, repositioning Riki to get the deepest penetration. Then he made a few small thrusts into his pet, testing his readiness, before plunging in full strength, savoring Riki's hot tightness with a broken moan. "Oh pet," he breathed. "You are always...so perfect."

Riki was still a little pissed off about the spanking, although the new position was intriguing. If Iason were to let go of him, he would fall flat on his face, and that feeling of vulnerability, of being forced to trust in his master's grip, was strangely exciting. He freely admitted it; he enjoyed being fucked by Iason, loved his confidence and indisputable authority, his every vocalization and facial twitch, his unfailing virility. His secret ambition was to make Iason curl his lip in that little sneer Raoul had produced when Riki had been forced to watch them together, a look that had been gnawing at him since that unhappy day.

Iason's grip on his wrists tightened and he shifted his position again, pushing Riki's feet a little wider apart and letting him drop closer to the floor. His gasps and then quiet moans told his pet that he was reaching his critical point. Throwing his head back, eyes closed, the Blondie suddenly cried out, almost startling his pet, who had never heard him vocalize his pleasure with such enthusiasm or volume.

"That was...exquisite," Iason whispered, finally.

"Sounded like it," Riki said, then added, a little mischievously, "This just proves you're a total pervert. Getting all excited after spanking me."

"Shall I spank you again, my insolent pet?"

"Thanks but...I'll pass."

Now Iason withdrew and pulled Riki to him, turning him around, and leaning down to offer a soft kiss. His pet returned the kiss, and for some time they just stood together thus, drinking in each other.

Later that same day, Iason decided to approach Daryl about something that had been on his mind for some time. Riki was up in the hot tub, so it was the opportunity he wanted to corner Daryl alone.

Daryl startled when he saw Iason standing in the doorway to the kitchen, a room he rarely entered.

“Master Iason. Can I...get you something?”

“I want to ask you something about that day,” Iason said, simply.

Daryl shifted his weight, nervous, knowing exactly what his master meant by ‘that day.’ “Yes, Sir?”

“I want you to tell me why the two of you chose Riki—I’m sure you could have paid for what you wanted at one of the open clubs. Why take such a risk with my pet?”

“Just because...we were both comfortable with him. I had done...things with him, under your orders, so he seemed like the best choice, since Katze had already been with him, too.”

As soon as he uttered this statement, Daryl realized his error, horrified.

Iason was quiet for a moment. “Katze...had already been with him, too,” he said slowly, with deliberate emphasis. The look on Daryl’s face told him that his suspicions, which had been eating at him for some time, were correct—it was Katze who his pet had engaged sexually with at the open club, not a total stranger as he had professed.

“So. It was Katze that night at Serendipity.”

Unable to lie directly to Iason when his master was questioning him in such a manner, Daryl bowed his head, saying nothing.

“I see. Your silence answers for you.” Iason gave a great sigh. “Then Riki has lied to me, and you have all deceived me. Now I must once again determine how you are to be punished.”

“Yes, Iason-sama,” Daryl replied, hanging his head.

With that, Iason turned on his heel and left, returning to his favorite chair where he had been reading a book on ancient philosophy. He had quite lost his interest in it, but pretended to

read it nevertheless, waiting for Riki to finish with his soak and come back downstairs. He knew his pet would immediately gravitate to the balcony for a smoke and he intended to intercept him before he could partake in that small pleasure. His anger mounting, the Blondie stared blankly at the pages of his book, growing increasingly incensed over his pet's lie.

Finally, Riki came wandering into the hall, seeming very relaxed from his soak, wearing only a robe. As Iason had predicted, he was making for the balcony, a pack of smokes and lighter in hand.

"Riki."

His pet stopped, looking toward him.

"Come here."

"Can't I just smoke first?"

Iason slammed his book shut. "Come here—NOW."

A little surprised with his master's harsh tone and manner, he approached him hesitantly.

"Sit." Iason pointed to his lap.

Crawling onto his lap, his pet waited, wondering what the Blondie wanted. Iason confiscated his smokes and lighter, placing them on the chair-side table.

"Hey!"

"Riki. I want you to tell me about the night you went to Serendipity."

Pausing for a moment, the mongrel replied, casually, "I was pretty drunk...I don't remember much."

"Who were you with that night?"

"I...told you, just some local. I don't know his name or anything."

"I see. You...don't know his name."

"No," his pet answered, squirming a bit.

"Riki," Iason said softly. "I already know it was Katze. I wanted to give you another opportunity to confess to me, but you chose instead to continue with your deception."

"Fuck," the mongrel breathed.

“Once again, it seems I must punish you. This is becoming rather tedious, pet. And I don’t know about you, but I could use some variety in our discipline sessions. So. We’re going to take a little trip to the pavilion. Go get dressed.”

With that, Riki scrambled to his feet as Iason rose, then put on some clothes, cursing at himself all the while. He heard a familiar jingling sound and sighed.

Iason collared his pet and cuffed him to his arm. As much as Riki despised being in chains, he knew better than to irritate his Blondie master with complaints when he was already pissed. He accompanied Iason down to the pavilion, head hanging down, as other unchained pets gazed at him. It seemed to him everyone in the complex was laughing at him.

The Blondie said nothing the entire walk, yanking on his chain every now and then for no apparent reason other than to communicate his extreme displeasure with his pet. Riki remained silent, too, knowing that it was futile to try and apologize or beg at this point. He was in for more punishment and there was nothing he could do about it. And he found that, for some reason, he didn’t mind as much as he thought he would. Some dark part of him missed his master’s punishing arm, though he was certain, before the day was over, he would feel differently. The only thing he fervently hoped was that Iason would not call Raoul.

They entered the shop that was restricted to Blondies and pets that accompanied them—one that Riki had peered in many times, curious. As soon as they walked inside, attendants came running.

“Lord Iason,” one of them said, bowing. “An honor. Can we help you find something?”

Lord Iason? Riki fought the urge to laugh at the title “Lord.” Iason, immediately sensing his mirth, shot him a warning glance and he quickly put on a more somber expression.

“I’m not sure what I want yet, so I will just look around a bit.”

The attendant glanced at Riki with a knowing smile. Blondies only brought naughty pets into the shop, ones that were going to be

punished. And everyone knew there was no pet naughtier than Iason Mink's Riki.

The mongrel gazed around the store in disbelief. It was filled with every sort of disciplinary device imaginable, from kasey-whips, straps and taming sticks to chains and T-stands. Iason led him through the store to a display of aerodynamic paddles.

"I'm leaning toward something like this," Iason said. "What do you think, pet? Have you ever been paddled before?"

"No," he whispered.

"These are all designed to encourage maximum velocity. See the holes? I've heard they're quite unpleasant. Just a few strikes should do it."

"How...how many strikes?" Riki asked, meekly.

"I haven't decided yet. So. Which one do you like?"

His pet stared at him, eyes starting to flash darkly. "None of them."

"Good. That's quite the answer I'd hoped for. All the same, pick one. We're not leaving here until you do."

Sighing, the mongrel scanned the rows of paddles, instinctively looking for the smallest one, and was about to select it. Then, he hesitated, his pride kicking in. Why should he give Iason the pleasure of seeing his fear? Summoning up his courage, he pointed to the most alarming looking paddle, an immense instrument of pain that he knew even Iason would not have selected.

Surprised, Iason picked it up, his hands shaking slightly. For some reason, his pet's choice sent a surge of excitement through him. It was almost as though Riki was deliberately taunting him to deliver maximum pain.

"Let's try it out, shall we?" he said, leading his pet to the target pole.

"You mean...in...here?" Riki glanced around at the other customers in the store, mortified.

"Just one swat to test it out. Put your hands on the pole."

Iason uncuffed himself from his pet so that he could use both hands to deliver the blow. As Riki clutched the pole with trembling

fingers, his Blondie master took a big swing and unleashed the paddle on his bottom full strength. Riki cried out in agony, despite his embarrassment at drawing attention to himself. The Blondies in the store smiled and continued shopping.

“Oh fuck,” Riki sobbed, in despair, now deeply regretting his choice.

Iason smiled at his pet’s obvious surprise at the intensity of the blow. “This should do nicely, I think,” he said.

An attendant, apparently lurking until Iason had found what he was looking for, approached him. “Have you found something you like, Lord Iason?”

This time the appellation of “Lord” did not seem nearly as funny to the mongrel, who rubbed his ass grumpily.

“Yes. I’ll take this.”

“Yes, Sir. Sir Yousi says you are to have whatever you wish, free of charge.”

“Give Yousi my regards,” Iason said, knowing full well Yousi was hiding in the back, afraid to show his face.

Cuffing himself once again to his pet, Iason led him outside. “So, pet. What did you think of that store? Quite a selection, wouldn’t you say?”

“It’s all fucked up shit for you Blondie sadistic fucks, in my opinion,” Riki replied, no longer caring if he annoyed Iason, since it was clear he was really getting it this time anyway.

Iason stopped. They were in the middle of the walkway, and he pulled Riki close to whisper in his ear, pressing the paddle suggestively to his backside while he spoke. “If you mean that I’m going to enjoy punishing you, you’re right. I’ve had it with you, Riki. It’s time for some serious discipline. I have half a mind to call Raoul.”

Breathing a little faster, his pet now changed his tone. “Please...please don’t call Raoul. I want YOU to punish me. Please, Iason. And afterwards I’ll...I want to pleasure you, however you want—you can fuck me as hard as you want. Please.”

Feeling a surge of carnal agitation from his pet's begging and promises of sexual favors, the Blondie swallowed a few times before responding. "Oh yes. I fully intend to take you when we're through. I'm quite looking forward to it."

He straightened up, now quite anxious to get on with the day's agenda. Their pace quickened as they reached the penthouse, and once they stepped inside, Iason immediately led Riki to the dining room table, uncuffing himself, and tugging down his pet's pants.

"Bend over."

Riki obeyed, his upper body resting on the table. He closed his eyes, waiting for the inevitable.

Iason had removed his cloak and let it drop on the floor. Then, gripping the paddle with both hands, and without any further prolegomena to punishment, he swung—striking his pet with a loud whack. Riki voiced his complete anguish, desperately trying to steel himself for another blow. Then...whack! Another punishing strike, accompanied by an even more pathetic cry. Iason brought his arms back again, then swung with all his might. This time his pet's cry had evolved into a scream. The Blondie paused for a moment, wiping sweat from his lip.

"Oh fuck! Please stop, Iason!" the mongrel pleaded. "I can't...take any more."

"You'll take it, pet, for as long as I give it. How dare you lie to me!" Whack!

"Master Iason, please!"

"You're only half way there, Riki. You have four more to go."

"No!" Riki cried. "You don't know...how fucking much this hurts."

"You're telling me about what hurts? How do you think I felt when I found out you LIED TO ME?" Whack!

Now Riki, in utter agony from this new form of punishment, made a desperate attempt to flee the scene. Iason immediately grabbed him and held him down on the table.

"You've just earned yourself one more, pet," he said, sternly. "Move again and I'll add three more."

Resigned to his fate, Riki tried to submit to his punishment, all the while kicking himself for choosing such an evil implement of pain.

“So it was twice with Katze!” Whack!

Iason was thoroughly enjoying his pet’s misery and loved administering the punishing blows to his bare bottom, which was now a blistering red.

“If you so much as touch him again, I’ll have Raoul paddle you—as many strikes as he wants!” Whack!

Gritting his teeth, Riki steeled himself for the next blow. Just two more, he thought. Yet his master’s next strike was more than he could bear, the pain making his eyes roll back as he cried out in a hoarse, broken sob.

Iason paused again, repositioning the paddle in his hand. This was the last strike. And he was going to make it burn. Swinging his arms with furious velocity, he hit his pet so hard it finally broke the skin, tiny droplets of blood welling up as Riki released his most tormented cry of all.

“And if you ever lie to me again, about the smallest thing,” Iason warned, “I’ll do this again, with double the blows.”

The Blondie watched his pet as he lay sobbing on the table, looking very disinclined to move. Unfastening his trouser flap, he stroked himself for a few moments—still holding his paddle—enjoying the sight of his limp, punished pet bent over the table, forced into submission. Within seconds he was fully aroused. He slammed the paddle down on the table, startling Riki, and positioned himself behind him, probing him to gain entry. His pet was always hot and tight, but never more so than right after being severely punished. Riki did not resist and, as Iason’s pleasure swelled, his pet’s tears diminished. He enjoyed being fucked by the Blondie, and somehow, now that the pain of the punishment had subsided, he felt strangely aroused by the thought of how his master must have looked as he swung the paddle with such devastating force. Iason had been extremely pissed off. He puzzled over his own

growing arousal, wondering why his master's anger sometimes excited him.

Iason pulled back on his hips and Riki took the opportunity to move back from the table and tend to his developing erection, stroking himself as the Blondie gave him a good fucking. Both of them were rising on the same path to completion, with almost synchronized gasps and moans.

"Oh pet," Iason whispered. He was surprised that Riki was so aroused after such brutal discipline, but it pleased him.

"I love it when you fuck me," Riki replied, sending the Blondie over the edge.

Whipping his head back, Iason ejaculated into his pet's tight embrace, his lips parting to emit a long, breathy moan that betrayed the intensity of his climax. Riki was coming, too, uttering his usual affirmations, his semen spraying onto the table.

"Fucking yes! Oh yeah," the mongrel moaned. "Fuck yeah."

The Blondie pulled out and fastened his trousers, then emitted a long sigh. "So, pet. Do you think we can go an entire week without my having to punish you?"

"Probably not," Riki admitted.

Iason smiled. At least his pet had learned not to lie to him.

Chapter 27

Buried Rage

Iason paused as he reached Katze's apartment, trying to regain his composure. He had worked himself up again on the drive over, thinking about Riki's infidelities with him, most especially the new revelation that it had been Katze who serviced his pet at Serendipity. After punishing Riki he had immediately left to confront Katze about the situation, with stern admonitions to Daryl not to try and call Katze to warn him.

He buzzed the door.

"Yes?" came the intercom.

"Iason Mink. Open up, Katze."

After a slight pause, the door hummed open, and Iason stepped inside, a little surprised by the simplicity and neatness of his apartment, and especially the number of books on shelves along the walls. He had never been to Katze's apartment—never had reason to visit—until today.

"Iason," Katze acknowledged with a nod, looking almost as though he expected him. Iason wondered if Daryl had disobeyed him and contacted him; but then, Katze hadn't fled. He was shirtless, his ribs bandaged and his shoulders in a brace, and his face was still lightly bruised. "Can I...get you some wine, perhaps?"

"No. I've come to talk."

Katze motioned to a chair and Iason sat down, crossing his legs. Lighting up a smoke, Katze sat down as well, looking at him with expectation. For a long moment the two of them only gazed at one another, communicating through a look alone an understanding of Katze's betrayal, and an acknowledgement of the injuries the

Blondie had inflicted on him for it. Iason did not ask about his stay at Tanagura Medical and Katze did not offer a synopsis—though he had gone through the exceedingly painful but effective E-wave treatment to accelerate the healing of his ribs and collarbone, apparently under Iason's orders. Katze had taken this as a hint from the Blondie and had returned to work the same day he was released, despite almost unbearable pain. Fortunately, he had plenty of pharmaceuticals to ease his discomfort and so was able to get through the workday and, at the moment, was feeling quite comfortable. Except for the fact that Iason Mink was now inside his apartment, staring at him with an inexplicable expression.

Perhaps I will have that wine," Iason said, finally, finding it difficult to know where to begin. His thoughts were so confused when it came to Katze—his most trusted advisor and player in the black market—and now the one man who had dared to pair with his pet, a man who Riki apparently found irresistible.

Katze smiled. "I have something I think you'll appreciate," he said, then showed him a bottle of White Moon.

Iason nodded his approval, slightly taken aback at Katze's rather sophisticated taste. As he opened the bottle, the Blondie studied his physique, noting his beautifully sculpted arms that rippled with his every movement, his narrow waist, and his compelling, rugged manner—his smoke dangling from his lips as he uncorked the wine. Yes, he could understand his pet's attraction, though he had never really seriously considered Katze before.

"I'm glad you came by," Katze said, handing him a glass of the fine wine. "I wanted to apologize to you again...for everything.

"Is that so?" Iason sipped the wine, feigning disinterest.

"Yes. Iason. It's just...since I've come to really know Daryl...I've found that I do things I wouldn't normally do—because of him. Even things that I know put us both at risk."

Iason made no reply, having some experience with this phenomenon himself.

“I’m not excusing what I did. I’m angry at myself for doing something that hurt you...especially after everything you’ve done for me.”

Iason sighed. “Katze. Tell me about Serendipity.”

Katze took a deep drag from his smoke, then exhaled, studying the Blondie. “I see. So...you know.”

“Yes. And it seems to me,” Iason said, his voice shaking slightly, “that some reprisal is due. Especially considering what happened...that day at the penthouse.”

Sighing, Katze leaned back in his chair. “All right. What did you have in mind? I’ll submit to it— whatever you want.”

“I was thinking a public whipping.”

Katze flinched a little at this, but made no protestation, though his heart began to pound. He had witnessed only two public whippings in his life, and both of them had left him feeling a little queasy.

“However,” Iason continued, “if this situation becomes public, we both know that Jupiter will become involved. I don’t want that.”

“Because of your reputation?”

“Not only that,” the Blondie said, evasively.

“Then what will satisfy you?”

“I’ll punish you myself at the penthouse. When you’re healed.”

Katze nodded, feeling relief that he was to be spared the public whipping, but a little anxious about what the Blondie had in mind for him. To Iason, he seemed surprisingly cool about being sentenced to punishment at his hands. In truth, Katze had been expecting it for some time. The Blondie’s rage on finding him with Riki had led to violence that was atypical for Iason—the Blondie usually preferred structured, organized punishment, and he knew there was no way Iason was finished with him. And now that he knew about Serendipity....

“But that’s not all. I want something else, right now,” Iason added, his voice lowering.

“What would that be?” Katze gazed back at him, wondering if he was reading the Blondie’s signals correctly.

“I want you to pleasure me. Take me in your mouth, exactly as you did with Riki.”

Stunned, Katze fell silent for a moment. Iason wanted to be sucked off? And this was his...punishment? He tried to suppress a laugh, thinking of the countless times he had fantasized about the Blondie. Putting out his smoke with deliberate thoroughness, he locked eyes with Iason, trying to gauge his mood. Was he simply curious? Feeling unusually perverted? Or...did he truly think he was disciplining Katze with his unorthodox request?

“As you wish,” he said, finally, but still hesitating.

“Now, Katze.”

Rising, Katze moved toward the beautiful Blondie. He had rehearsed his moment in his mind a thousand times and was trying not to betray how delighted he was with Iason’s “punishment.” As Iason’s Furniture, he had watched his master masturbate countless times as the Blondie enjoyed one pet copulating after another; Katze had always desperately wanted his master to ask him for sexual favors. But Iason never did. One time the Blondie had run his bare hand through his hair, and held his chin for a moment as though he were considering him, but then he had released him and walked away. That was why, when he learned Iason was taking his own pet, Katze had been so astonished, perhaps even...a little hurt, though he knew it was foolish. Why should a Blondie be interested in a castrated slave?

And now, he was finally being asked to service the beautiful Blondie. Remembering what Daryl had told him about pleasuring Iason, he straddled him in the chair and gently pushed his hair aside; then, he began kissing and biting his neck, running his tongue in small swirls up to his ear and nibbling on his earlobe. Iason closed his eyes and opened his mouth with a little gasp, tingling from Katze’s erotic meanderings along this throat. Though, technically, he had not done this to Riki, Katze wanted to pleasure Iason as best as he could. Perhaps then the Blondie would forgive him his transgressions.

Breaking way, Katze started towards his lips, then hesitated. “Do you...want me to kiss you?”

Iason answered him by pulling him closer, and as Katze’s lips met those of the fearsome Blondie, he felt his heart racing. Exploring his mouth with his tongue, Katze was melting from the sweetness of the kiss, a charged chemistry that surprised them both. Iason found that he truly enjoyed the kiss and surrendered to it for several minutes, forgetting the purpose of his little “experiment” with Katze. His enjoyment was apparent by his growing erection, which Katze could feel moving beneath his thighs.

After a few minutes of this, Katze got down on his knees as Iason unfastened his trousers and revealed his arousal with gleaming eyes. In his signature move, Katze pushed the Blondie’s legs apart with dramatic firmness, pulling him forward to reposition him lower on the seat, an action that Iason found unequivocally exciting, yet a little disturbing when he imagined what Riki’s reaction to it had been. As Katze began to stimulate him with his tongue, the Blondie was overcome with conflicting sensations—the sensual pleasure provided by Katze, and his burgeoning jealousy as he imagined his pet receiving such ministrations...and his anger with Katze for daring to pair with his pet. His every move inspired a host of images of Katze and Riki together, of his pet’s moans and erotic, mongrel-style proclamations and vulgarities that always accompanied his escalation to completion.

Iason didn’t know why he was tormenting himself by having Katze service him...why he had a compelling need to know how his pet had enjoyed Katze, and what he had experienced. Yet the more aroused he became, the more his jealousy and anger multiplied as he imagined his pet in a similarly aroused state. He could see Riki in his mind, reaching down to grab hold of Katze’s head—he could hear his moans, imagined the instructions his pet gave, could see him thrusting up into Katze’s mouth as his eyes rolled back with ecstasy. And it was a self-feeding loop. He was quickly reaching his

peak, finding that his anger and jealousy fueled his arousal rather than inhibited it.

Katze, though initially thrilled with the opportunity to pleasure Iason, now began thinking about Daryl, wondering how he would feel if he could see Katze now. Would it excite him...or hurt him? He began to feel a little guilty for feeling so much pleasure. Wasn't that a sort of betrayal? Suddenly he worried about what Iason had in mind—perhaps he intended to punish Daryl by telling him of their encounter, of hurting Daryl psychologically and emotionally. This thought remained in the front of his mind until he became convinced of Iason's secret plan and could no longer enjoy what he was doing, didn't want to be kneeling before the Blondie. To speed up the Blondie's copulation, Katze became more enthusiastic with his lingual manipulations, sucking and wiggling his tongue a little faster.

Iason responded to this increase of stimulation, removing his gloves and running his hands through Katze's soft, dark auburn hair, then guiding his head at the pace he preferred, thrusting up into his mouth. He let his head drop back as he neared completion, breathing deeply but making no other vocal indication of his pleasure, until finally a series of gasps made his approach indisputable. As he began ejaculating into Katze's mouth, he uttered a low, broken groan, gritting his teeth from the intensity of the release. The only thing he could think about as he climaxed was how Riki had felt the same pleasure from Katze, a thought that nearly drove him out of his mind with all-consuming jealousy. Glaring down at Katze, who still had his essence dripping from his mouth, the Blondie suddenly felt overcome with rage, and in the next instant he had closed his hands around Katze's neck, choking him. The only thought in his mind was that Katze had paired with Riki. And for that...he would kill Katze.

Surprised, and horrified, Katze grabbed Iason's wrists in an attempt to repel him but was no match for the Blondie's extraordinary strength. His face grew red as Iason squeezed tighter, and finally, his eyes began to roll back. He realized then that Iason

was going to kill him after all, and he tried desperately to send Daryl a message of love with his mind, promising to look over him from the other side, if it were possible.

Then Iason, looking down at Katze's helpless and almost lifeless form, suddenly released him, hands shaking. Katze fell back, holding his throat and gasping for air, and looking up at the Blondie with a mixture of fear and surprise.

Fastening his trousers and putting on his gloves, Iason rose as if to go.

"Why...did you let me go?" Katze whispered, still breathing hard.

"No particular reason," the Blondie answered, softly. In fact, he had not come to Katze's apartment to strangle him. He was not even sure why he had done so—or why he had released him. His emotions confused him with their intensity and complexity; he was not used to reacting so viscerally to things. Rage, for the Blondie, had always made him react in unpredictable ways; Iason felt, if he had one weakness, it was this.

"Regarding what we spoke about, I'll summon you in a few weeks."

Still shaken from his near-death experience, Katze only nodded, unable to reply.

Then, without further conversation, Iason left.

Katze stared at the door for a long moment, then sat down, lighting a smoke with trembling fingers. He reviewed the encounter, puzzling over what exactly had gone wrong. He was sure Iason had enjoyed the sex—it had been quite evident from his body cues—not to mention the fact that he had copulated. Then why...had he tried to kill him? And why had he asked to be pleased in the first place? Confused, he desperately wished he could talk to Daryl, but there was no way—he would have to wait until Daryl contacted him again, until he found a public terminal, because Iason would certainly check the logs for incoming and outgoing calls. When he had called earlier to warn him of Iason's visit, Katze had berated him for taking the risk, perhaps a little too harshly in his concern for him,

and now he longed to reassure him. He knew Daryl was worried, as well—and now Katze had his own worry—that Iason would use their pairing to hurt his lover.

And now he had punishment at the hands of Iason Mink to look forward to. Katze knew the Blondie's arm all too well—but he had never been punished for anything as serious as his transgressions with Riki. Knowing Iason, he would probably make Daryl watch. But...Katze knew he deserved it. He finished his smoke, observing Iason's barely touched glass of White Moon. A nearly full glass of expensive wine...wasted. Sighing, he dropped the butt into the wine, berating himself for his profound stupidity.

* * *

Daryl was beside himself with worry. He had watched Riki's punishment with the paddle and knew Iason was in a particularly foul mood—there was no doubt that he had wanted his pet to feel his anger. He had used both hands. On Riki's bare flesh. When Iason left immediately afterward, Daryl had run down to the pavilion to use the public terminal in order to warn Katze, but Katze had been furious with him for doing so.

“You know better than to call me,” he snapped.

“I'm calling from the pavilion—from a public box.”

“Even so, it's too dangerous. You turn your ass around RIGHT NOW and get back home. Hear me?”

“But...Iason's coming for you. He made me promise not to warn you.”

“Daryl! Then get the fuck off the phone right now!”

“But I have to tell you—”

“No. I'm hanging up.”

Katze had hung up then, and Daryl had been unable to warn him that Iason knew about Serendipity. Struggling to fight back the tears from Katze's harsh tone of voice, he rushed back to the penthouse, worried also about Riki.

Riki was in his own room, lying facedown on the bed, with his pants pulled down to his knees. Daryl gasped when he saw the angry, raised welts on the mongrel's bottom.

"Oh Riki...I'm s-so sorry," Daryl stammered.

"It isn't your fault," Riki answered, sighing.

"But it is—I accidentally told him about Katze. I didn't mean to...it just slipped out. I'm such an idiot."

"He would have found out one way or another anyway."

"I wish it had been another way," Daryl lamented. "And now...what if Iason kills Katze?"

"He won't. If he didn't kill him when he caught him in the act, he won't kill him now."

"But he was so furious with you."

Riki laughed. "That's because he's a fucking pervert who sits around looking for reasons to punish me. You should have seen him at the pavilion—he fucking got off picking out the paddle. He made ME pick it out, the bastard. And then he whacked me in the store with it, too, in front of everyone. And it was one fucking hard whack, too. I about wet my pants."

"We'd better put something on that," Daryl said, now examining his broken flesh.

"Do we have to?" Riki whined. "It's gonna sting so bad."

"Yes, we need to. Master Iason will want to inspect you. You can take it."

"Since when did you start calling him Master Iason around me again? The prick. We should just call him Master Misery. Or maybe Mr. Sadistic Fuck."

Daryl smiled, rushing to retrieve the medical kit, then returning to tend to Riki's punished flesh. The mongrel was quite vocal, complaining all the while about how much he was hurting him.

"You're such a baby," Daryl said, finally.

Surprised, Riki fell silent for a moment, then broke into a laugh. "You've changed a lot. Ever since you started seeing Katze."

"Is it...a good change or a bad change?"

“Good. He’s really helped you. You’re not nearly wound so tight. You used to be like one of those shaky, nervous little dogs—the slightest movement would send you through the roof.”

“Did I show you what he gave me?” Daryl pulled the pendant out from beneath his shirt, leaning down so Riki could read the inscription.

“Well shit. Isn’t that just the most fucking romantic thing ever,” Riki teased. “So Katze LOVES you, huh? Does that mean you LOVE Katze? Are Daryl and Katze IN LOVE always and forever?”

Daryl smiled at his ribbing, seeming not to mind. “Yeah,” he admitted. “I do love him. More than anything. Just like I know you love Iason, deep in your heart.”

Now Riki grew quiet, looking away. “I don’t love him. I fucking hate him.”

“No, you don’t. Right now you’re angry because he punished you.”

Riki scowled. “Okay. I admit it. I’m so pissed off right now I could wring his neck. But I DON’T love him.”

“You do. And...he loves you.”

The mongrel shook his head vigorously. “That’s a lie. He can’t love me. He treats me like garbage.”

“That’s not true, and you know it. He gives you special treatment. Can you really blame him for punishing you? We all knew we’d be in trouble if he found out. Don’t you get why he’s so furious with you? It’s because he wants you all to himself. He loves you and he’s jealous. I’d feel the same way if I found out Katze had been with someone...unless, of course,” he added with a smile, “I got to watch.”

“I think he punishes me just because he likes to.”

Daryl considered that for a moment. “There’s probably some truth in that,” he conceded. “But it’s not the only reason. He’s hurting, Riki. What he wants—what he’s always wanted—is for you to come to him freely and love him.”

“I’m hurting, too,” Riki pouted, thinking of Raoul.

“But,” Daryl said softly, “you’re Iason’s pet. It’s your duty to please your master, and obey his commands.”

Scoffing at this, the mongrel turned away. “You’re lecturing me now? After you asked me to fuck you? Is that the Furniture’s duty?”

Hurt, Daryl fell silent, then rose to leave.

“Hey. Fuck.” Riki groaned, loudly, hitting his face multiple times on the bed. “I’m sorry. I’m an asshole—don’t leave.”

“It’s all right. I should check on dinner anyway.”

“Daryl. Please don’t mind me...I’m in a really shitty mood. My ass feels like a volcano erupted on it.”

“I understand. I don’t...mind you.”

The front door hummed open and Iason came in.

Daryl rushed to meet him. “Good afternoon, Master Iason.” He looked at him anxiously, as if expecting to see from his expression what had happened to Katze. Iason ignored him and went straight to the command center, typing in a few codes for the call logs. Satisfied that Daryl had not tried to contact Katze, he nodded at him.

“Where’s Riki?”

“In his bedroom.”

The Blondie immediately made for Riki’s room, stopping when he reached the doorway and apprehended his pet lying half naked on the bed. Although he had just relieved himself with Katze, Iason was hit with a powerful surge of lust upon seeing Riki, his bare, raw bottom smarting red and covered with welts from his paddling, exposed in an obvious attempt to lessen his pain, his pants pulled down pathetically to his knees. His heart beating faster, Iason took off his cloak and began undressing.

“Wha...what are you doing?” Riki asked, alarmed.

“That should be quite obvious. I’m preparing to take you.”

“Please...Iason...I’m so sore—let me suck you.”

“If I want to take you, I’ll do so, in whatever manner I please,” the Blondie replied, softly, gracefully letting his bodysuit drop to the floor. He stood there, completely naked, stroking his massive erection with one hand. “Don’t move.”

“No! Pleeeasse, Iason,” Riki pleaded.

“Hush, pet.” Now the Blondie straddled his pet, resting his hands on his pet’s punished flesh as he pushed his legs firmly together.

“Ow! Don’t touch it! Dammit, Iason, you fucking—”

“That’s enough, pet,” Iason said, sharply. “Or I’ll spank you, HARD, and I mean it.”

Riki fell silent, trembling.

Iason stroked himself for a few moments, then gently rubbed his engorged member across his pet’s raw bottom, sliding it down between his buttocks until he found, with a little wiggle, his portal. Riki was whimpering with his every touch. With one hand, he pinned his pet’s wrists to his back. He began thrusting gently, each time gaining deeper access, until he had fully penetrated, fucking his pet with deep, insistent strokes. The sight of his half-dressed pet below him, his backside so thoroughly violated from the paddling, was undeniably stimulating to the Blondie, and he undulated with an erotic sensuality that betrayed his state of extreme arousal. He was actually still quite angry at Riki, and in this position—his favorite position of all—he felt as though he exerted some kind of control over his unruly pet as he pinned him down, relishing the marks of punishment on his pet’s flesh and Riki’s tormented cries. Then, he simply started to enjoy fucking Riki—his beloved pet—who he loved so much, despite his many faults and transgressions.

Closing his eyes and throwing his head back, he began gasping, then, biting his lip, he moaned softly. If Riki could have seen his master’s face, he would have seen there a slight curl of his lip—the coveted sneer of pleasure Raoul had once produced—the very look Riki so sought to elicit from Iason.

“Oh, pet,” he breathed, gasping.

“Fucking come already!” Riki snapped.

Startled, Iason slowed his pace for a moment, then brought his hand down, hard, on Riki’s bottom. His pet howled in response.

“What did I tell you?” Iason scolded. “Would you like more?”

“No,” Riki moaned. “It just...hurts so much.”

“You want me to come?” the Blondie whispered. “We can speed things up, if I fuck you...like THIS.” With that, Iason began thrusting as hard as he could, plunging deep into his prostrate pet, who cried out in misery as his master slammed against his sensitive flesh.

This did, in fact, accelerate the pace toward completion. With a series of increasingly excited gasps, Iason suddenly whipped his head back, crying out in ecstasy as he ejaculated deep into his pet, his release so exquisitely sweet that he could hardly believe such pleasure was possible. And then, on top of it, something extraordinary happened. It was as though the world faded away, and he and Riki were alone together, in a beautiful garden, and all around them cherry blossoms swirled down from the trees. They were standing close together, and Riki looked up at him and said, “Iason. I really do love you.” It was so beautiful, so perfect, and then...it was gone.

“Iason! Iason! What’s wrong?”

The Blondie blinked and realized that he had somehow fallen on top of his pet. He got up and began to dress, confused.

“What happened?” Riki asked again. “Did you pass out?”

Iason shook his head, puzzled. “It was some sort of vision...like the one I had when I was poisoned.”

“Agatha’s Halo,” the mongrel breathed. “So it’s true. You really can have visions. Are you...okay?”

The Blondie smiled. “What, don’t tell me you’re concerned about me?”

Riki scowled, turning away with a little pout.

“You’d better watch yourself, pet,” Iason warned, shaking his finger at him. “You almost got yourself another spanking back there.”

His pet sighed, reaching down to tug up his pants as though worried Iason would ravish or spank him again.

“Leave them down. You’ll be more comfortable. I’m finished for today.”

“I’m glad I could be of service, Lord Iason,” the mongrel replied, saucily, then, when Iason made as if to spank him again, broke out into a laugh. “I’m teasing, I’m teasing!”

Smiling, Iason bent down and kissed him. “You’re a naughty little pet,” he whispered, nuzzling his cheek. “But I’ve grown quite fond of you. So be good and stop disobeying me, and I won’t have to punish you like this anymore.”

“You’ll punish me anyway just because you want to, you perv.”

“For someone who claims to enjoy being punished, you complain a good deal about it,” the Blondie observed.

“I might like it SOMETIMES but not every fucking day. Plus it’s a matter of degree. And now it’s like each time is worse than the last.”

“You wouldn’t be punished every day if you would BEHAVE every day. You continue to disobey me—”

“Is this going to be another one of those boring lectures?” Riki sighed.

“If you’re going for the punishment-free option, I wouldn’t advise insolence as your main style of discourse.”

“Whatever.”

Iason laughed softly. “You won’t last three days. You’ll do something, pet. You’ll be naughty. And when I catch you, you’re going to get it, right on that sore bottom of yours.”

“Hmphf,” Riki snorted. “We’ll see about that.”

“Yes,” the Blondie agreed, with a smile, “we will.”

Of Whips and Chains... and Mongrel Charms

Riki was heading toward the observatory, robe in hand, preparing to soak in the hot tub. He was sore and grumpy from his paddling and had spent the night tossing and turning. As he passed through the great hall, Iason's voice stopped him. Riki turned to see the handsome Blondie standing by the window, both hands on his hips.

"Riki. Where are you going?"

"To...the observatory."

"Why?"

"Because I want to use the hot tub," Riki snapped. "I can fucking hardly move."

"I don't recall giving you permission to do so," Iason said, softly.

"You've got to be kidding. Please tell me you're fucking kidding."

"Come here."

Sighing with exaggerated annoyance, the mongrel stomped toward his Blondie master. Iason reached down and took hold of his chin, leaning close. "How quickly you forget that you, Riki are my pet—and that I am your master. So today you're going to have a lesson in what it means to be a pet."

Dragging him over to the special cabinet where his chains were kept, Iason quickly cuffed his pet, and then cuffed himself to Riki via the long chain that attached to his collar.

“Where are we going?” Riki demanded.

“To a public whipping. It’s time you knew what happens to truly disobedient pets.” Iason smiled at his pet’s obvious surprise and consternation.

Riki, misunderstanding his master’s meaning, now quickly changed his tone and demeanor. “You’re...you’re going to have me whipped...in p-public?” he stammered, his eyes widening in a way that was completely endearing to the Blondie.

Iason laughed softly, then bent over and kissed his forehead. “Not you, pet,” he replied. “At least...not today.”

The Blondie secretly had absolutely no intention of ever putting his pet through a public whipping; he preferred the intimacy of a private discipline session, and, out of personal preference, one that produced less blood and more erotic desserts. But it would be good for Riki to see the possible consequences of disobedience; perhaps he would even appreciate Iason’s leniency. The public whippings were held precisely for that purpose—to frighten recalcitrant pets—and sometimes even Furniture—into obedience. One viewing was usually sufficient to curb even the most unruly pet, although Iason had his doubts as to what effect the experience would have on his intractable mongrel.

Nevertheless, they were going, if for one reason only—the administrator of this particular public whipping was someone Riki knew well: Raoul. Iason knew that his pet would be mortified at the thought of being subjected to Raoul’s punishing arm in such a manner. Further, this was not the first time Raoul had executed a public whipping. Raoul had a penchant for whippings, and was quite good—and feared—at what he did. In truth, he was something of a performer, and Iason knew it was a show his pet would never forget.

Once he realized he was in no immediate peril, Riki reverted back to his previous attitude—a hybrid of defiance and annoyance, plus a bit of sulking over having to wear chains in public, which he absolutely abhorred.

Even before they left the penthouse, Iason had perceptibly shifted his own demeanor, and Riki realized by his stern aloofness that his master had his “public” face on. Pulling firmly on his chain as though he needed coaxing, the Blondie communicated his authority and hinted as to the importance of obedience in public. They drove to the viewing mostly in silence, until they neared the site.

“What you’re about to see is not going to be pleasant,” Iason warned.

Riki gave a little snort of derision, as though he were completely unconcerned, although he was, in fact, a bit nervous about the event, and his heart began to beat a little faster.

The Blondie raised an eyebrow. “I see. You think this will be nothing, do you? Well, pet. You’ll soon find out otherwise.”

“Whatever,” Riki mumbled, with a little laugh.

With that, Iason put the car into park, turned off the generator, then leaned close to him. “You’d better wipe that smirk off your face, Riki. I’m not above putting you over my knee right now. Would you like that?” He paused for a moment. “I didn’t think so. Now, there’s going to be quite a crowd. You’ll be on your best behavior. And in case you don’t think I mean it,” now he moved aside his cloak, revealing the taming stick he had purposely brought along as a deterrent, “I won’t hesitate to tame you in public, despite your compromised state. I think you know that’s not an idle threat.”

Riki sighed, averting his eyes, though not particularly happy to see that Iason had brought the taming stick.

Iason took hold of his chin, demanding his attention. “Are you going to behave?”

“Yeah.”

“What was that?” he asked sharply.

“Yes...Master Iason.” His pet whispered these words, as always feeling uncomfortable when made to address Iason formally as his master.

Satisfied, the Blondie let go of him and then got out of the car. Riki followed him, forced to use the driver’s side since he was

chained to Iason. Now for the first time the mongrel noticed that they were near the Emporium—it was across the street from the square. They were joining a sizeable crowd that had gathered around a platform where several Blondies were conversing. Also on the platform was a rather distressed-looking pet, completely naked but for his cuffs and chains, whose neck chain led to the wristcuff of one of the conversing Blondies. As they made their way a little closer, Riki was distracted by one of the men there on the platform and caught his breath when the Blondie turned so that his profile was in view.

Raoul. It was Raoul.

What the fuck is he doing here? Riki wondered, barely catching himself before he uttered the words aloud. Iason sensed his surprise and smiled.

Riki stared at Raoul, puzzled, then saw he was holding a whip. The realization that Raoul was going to be administering the punishment now began to sink in. Slowly, he looked up at Iason, who was observing him carefully.

“That’s right, pet,” he said, softly. “Now you’re going to see what Raoul is truly capable of.”

As Riki stared uneasily at his nemesis, Raoul almost seemed to sense their presence. He turned and saw Iason and smiled, nodding slightly. He was extremely pleased that Iason had followed his suggestion to bring Riki to the public whipping. His eyes moved to Iason’s pet, who stared back at him darkly before looking away.

Riki looked around and saw that most of the spectators were Blondies with their pets—all of them chained, as he was. He noticed, too, that the other pets seemed to share his apprehension.

Now there was some movement on the platform as the Blondie whose pet was to be whipped removed his own wristcuff and then, leading his pet firmly to the pole, lifted him and positioned his chained hands above his head on a hook there. Setting him back down, he pushed his legs apart until his ankle chains were taut, then added a second set of cuffs above those, ones that were permanently attached to the platform and which chained him firmly

to it. Riki couldn't help but notice that the pet was quite attractive, his body flawless, with light skin and hair, and a firm, perfectly curved bottom that he would have loved to have subjected to a good fucking.

Now the Blondie seemed to whisper something privately in his pet's ear, presumably reiterating his displeasure. This went on for a long moment, the Blondie apparently having plenty to say. Without meaning to, Riki shuddered, imagining what Iason would say to him, if he were in a similar place.

The Blondie moved a few steps away and nodded to Raoul.

"Pet!" Raoul's voice boomed, despite being outside. "Your disobedience has brought you here today. You were given ample opportunity to reform, yet you chose to continually defy your master."

Riki felt a small tug on his chain as Iason summoned him a little closer. He was aware that his Blondie master had shifted positions and was now behind him, his body nearly touching his own.

"So," now Raoul cracked the whip menacingly, "you are about to be severely punished. This is what happens to pets," another crack of the whip, this time Raoul seemed to be addressing the pets in the crowd, "who are disobedient."

Raoul's gaze fell on Riki, and he continued with a wicked smile, looking directly at him as he spoke. "You deserve what's coming. I have no pity for you. You are a naughty, insolent pet and I won't spare my arm here today." He cracked the whip harder this time, turning his attention back to the chained pet. "Z540K. What I'm about to do to you will leave scars you'll carry for the rest of your life. This is part of your punishment; no one wants a marked pet."

Now Raoul removed his cloak, Yui, his Furniture, scurrying to help him and then quietly retreating to the edge of the platform. In his close-fitting bodysuit, it was easy to see how well-built the Blondie was—tall, strong, and broad-shouldered, the muscles of his legs bulging through the thin fabric. Raoul began pacing back and forth, simply cracking the whip as though attempting to fully

terrorize the doomed pet before the punishment even began. His silence was almost as effective as his words had been. Riki shuddered again, feeling empathy for the poor unruly pet, whose unnamed transgressions had led to such dire consequences.

Suddenly, with lightning speed and a formidable crack, Raoul sent the whip flying into the exposed flesh of the pet, eliciting a scream and a brilliant streak of blood that dripped down his back in tiny crimson paths. Raoul paced again and then, crack! The whip unleashed with beautiful precision, as evidenced by the pet's even more alarming scream. Thus commenced the public whipping of the unfortunate pet under the merciless arm of Raoul Am, who seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself, whipping his body around in a hypnotic half spin that made punishment look like an art form. He crouched down a bit as he released his fury, his thighs almost bursting through his tight bodysuit, his long golden hair swinging in an arc behind him. Sometimes he swung the whip over his head in a circle a few times before striking. Other times he picked out a pet in the crowd to frighten, smiling disconcertingly as he flipped the whip suggestively, before turning to strike with fearsome brutality once again. All the while the pet's screams pierced through the air, sending chills through Riki, as well as the other pets there, while the Blondies looked on impassively or with unveiled amusement and pleasure.

Blood was now streaming down the pet's back, vividly red against his fair skin, as Raoul wiped the sweat that now dripped from his own face with his arm—until Yui came rushing to him with a towel and a drink of water. Raoul drank half the water and poured the rest on his face, shaking the wetness off like a great wild cat caught unexpectedly in the rain, his mane of hair swaying intoxicatingly. Then he threw the whip up into the air with a little spin just for show, catching it masterfully and immediately unleashing it again, this time striking like a snake on the pet's untouched buttocks, eliciting murmurs of approval and some laughter from the watching Blondies.

Riki was horrified. Without even realizing it, he had backed up, reaching behind him to clutch Iason's thigh, grabbing onto his body suit for reassurance. Thrilled with his pet's reaction, Iason moved even closer, repositioning his cloak so that no one could see just how close he was. His body now brushed against his pet.

He could feel Riki trembling. He leaned down and whispered softly in his ear, "Are you frightened, pet?"

Riki's silence answered for him, and the Blondie smiled. "Would you rather have that Blondie for your master?" Now Iason pressed himself up against the mongrel, having developed an erection from his pet's closeness and Raoul's showmanship. His mastery with a whip was something that Iason had always found attractive about Raoul, simply because he did it so well. And now, Riki's trembling and his furtive grasping behind him had set his blood pounding.

When the Blondie began slowly rubbing up against him, Riki was, at first, startled, and then surprised, given the fact that they were in a public place. But then he realized that all eyes were on the platform, and that Iason was shielding him with his cloak. Iason's slight maneuvers against his bottom and lower back, while triggering some soreness, also had the embarrassing effect of making him aroused.

"I'm getting hard," he whispered. "Everyone will see."

"Your only concern should be what pleases me," came Iason's hushed reply.

Riki fell silent, closing his eyes, now longing for some serious fucking. "What...would please you?"

"You'll find out soon enough. But I want to know...what do you think of the whipping?"

His pet grew quiet again, feeling a little sickened by all the blood, and yet aroused at the same time from his master's erotic movements.

"What, you don't care for it? How very disappointing. To think I brought you here on a special trip and you aren't even enjoying

yourself,” Iason teased. “And here Raoul wanted you to come especially.”

Riki flinched at this, watching Raoul’s mesmerizing performance with a mixture of awe, hatred, and fear. He couldn’t deny that the Blondie had a certain...flair...for what he did. And his brutal strength left no doubt that his punishment was more than just a good show—he inflicted pure pain, as evidenced by the reddened canvas of the pet’s flesh and his agonized, gut-wrenching screams.

The show came to an abrupt end when the pet finally passed out. Raoul wiped his face with a fresh towel offered by Yui, draining a second canister of water as the pet was taken down from the pole by his Blondie master and his servants. The crowd began breaking up as the Blondies escorted their frightened pets—some of them in tears—back home.

“Come, pet,” Iason whispered. “Let’s pay Raoul our respects.”

Mortified, Riki obeyed only because he had no choice, trying to use his chains to mask his erection. Raoul saw them approaching the platform and went to the edge, crouching down.

“Glad you could make it,” he said, smiling at Iason, immediately sensing his old lover’s arousal, and verifying it with a glance.

“My pleasure, Raoul. As always, you put on quite a show.”

“And what about you?” Raoul asked, eyes gleaming as he acknowledged Riki, a little surprised to discover his obvious arousal, and amused at the pet’s attempt to hide it. “Did you enjoy it, also?” Laughing when the mongrel failed to answer, he turned to Iason, “If you decide to do a public whipping, just let me know.”

“Will do. Although I hope that won’t be necessary,” the Blondie replied, giving Riki a pointed look.

Feeling as though he were sinking down into his shoes, Riki averted his eyes, silent.

Raoul laughed softly, thrilled with his consternation, and desperately hoping the mongrel would continue his disobedience so he could have the pleasure of disciplining him again—if not at a

public whipping, then at the penthouse, like he had done before. He had been actively fantasizing about doing so ever since he had punished Riki, lusting for the exceedingly tight grip of the mongrel. But of course, he wanted Iason even more.

“Iason,” he said, lowering his voice. “Come over tonight. I want to show you something.”

“What would that be?” Iason answered, knowing full well the Blondie only wanted to lure him to his apartment for sexual domination.

“It’s...a surprise,” Raoul replied, with a mysterious smile.

“Not tonight,” Iason replied, after a pause. “Perhaps another time? Is it something you could show me...at work?”

The disappointment on Raoul’s face was so transparent that Riki almost laughed.

“What’s so amusing?” Raoul demanded, glaring at Iason’s smirking pet.

Iason pulled him a little closer with his chain. “Behave,” he whispered.

Raoul had been rejected and Riki was delighted. With great difficulty, the mongrel suppressed his smile, wisely averting his eyes.

“Another time then,” Raoul said, hopefully, and Iason acknowledged this remark ambiguously with a smile and a slight nod before turning to leave. Riki risked a final glance back at the Blondie, who looked after Iason with such longing that he almost—had he not utterly and completely despised the sadistic fuck—felt sorry for him.

Inside the car, Iason immediately darkened the windows and leaned over to his pet, pulling him close in a long, searching kiss. The Blondie broke away only to offer tantalizing nibbles along the mongrel’s neck, which Riki responded to with a series of gasps, his chains jangling as he instinctively adjusted himself and began a few self-pleasuring strokes.

His master immediately took hold of his hand and, after unfastening his trousers, guided it to his own aching erection. Keeping his hand over his pet’s, he demonstrated with a few erotic

strokes how he wanted to be pleased. Riki obeyed, now beside himself with excitement, desperate for carnal engagement.

“Are you gonna fuck me now?” he whispered.

Closing his eyes with a slight shiver, the Blondie resisted the urge to do so with great difficulty, firmly pushing his pet’s hand away and fastening his trousers. “Not yet,” he answered, his eyes betraying his lust.

* * *

Daryl had used Iason’s absence as an opportunity to contact Katze from a public terminal with full visual.

“I told you not to call me,” Katze said, his voice a little hoarse.

“What’s wrong with your voice?” Daryl demanded. “What’s wrong with your—are those bruises on your neck? Did Iason do that?”

Katze nodded, lighting up a smoke. “Thought the fucker was going to take me down for sure. But then he...let me go.”

“Oh, Katze!”

“Has he...talked to you at all, love?”

Smiling with relief to hear Katze use his petname, Daryl shook his head.

“All right. Daryl. I’ve got to tell you something. When he came over, he—wanted certain things.”

Daryl blinked at this, slowly comprehending what Katze was getting at. “What...exactly?”

“You really want to know?”

“Yes.”

“He just wanted me to suck him off. But then right after that...I don’t know what happened exactly...that’s when he almost strangled me.”

“I see,” Daryl said, feeling a little stab of jealousy.

“Hey. It was—are you...hey. Daryl.” Katze observed his lover’s expression with alarm, unable to get his thoughts in order. “Don’t

look like that. I don't know why he made me do it. That's not all he has in mind—I'm to be punished once these fractures are healed."

"What was it...like?"

Katze paused for a moment. "I don't want to talk about this over videocom. Let's wait until we can be together."

"That makes it sound like...you have something to say," Daryl said, his voice quivering.

"Oh Daryl," Katze groaned. "Please, love, don't be hurt. I love you so much. You know that. I just want you to know, no matter what Iason tells you, what it says on that pendant is true. I'm yours...always."

Daryl smiled, trying to push his worries out of his mind. "What you said earlier, what did you mean about...being punished?"

"He threatened to subject me to a public whipping, but then he said he preferred to punish me at the penthouse."

"That's where they've gone—Iason and Riki—to a public whipping."

Katze nodded. "Yeah, I heard about it. It's one of Raoul's whippings. And if I know Iason...my guess is, he didn't tell him it was Raoul beforehand."

Daryl didn't answer, now afraid for Katze. His threat to do a public whipping set the bar higher for Katze's punishment.

Katze, sensing his uneasiness, tried to be nonchalant about it. "This won't be the first time I've had to endure his arm. I can take it."

"When will it happen?"

"He said he'd summon me. So I don't know. But I'm sure, whenever it happens...he'll make you watch."

Daryl sighed, knowing all too well that Katze was right.

* * *

As they rode up the elevator to the top floor, Iason pinned his pet to the wall, fondling him and probing his mouth open with his tongue, kissing him with increasing urgency. Both of them were so

aroused that it was almost painful. The sight of his pet in chains always gave Iason a thrill, and the public whipping had excited him immensely. He was desperate for his pet, could hardly wait to get inside the penthouse.

When they reached the top floor and exited the elevator, Iason strode so quickly toward their door that Riki had to almost run to keep pace, his chains jangling. As soon as they stepped inside, Iason pinned his pet up against the door, now molesting him with undeniable intent, tugging down his trousers to reveal Riki's erection.

With uncharacteristic initiative, the mongrel fumbled with Iason's trousers, releasing his master's rigid organ, which he immediately began stroking. Gasping, the Blondie allowed his pet to fondle him for a few moments before leading him to a chair in the great hall. He positioned Riki behind the chair.

"Bend over. Hold onto the chair," he commanded.

As he did so, Iason removed a vial from his pocket that he had correctly predicted would be wanted that afternoon, pouring the oil onto his hand and then onto his hardened organ with a little moan. Spreading Riki apart with his hands, he inserted a finger, and then a second, both sliding in easily from the lubrication. Although Riki was now badly bruised and sore from his paddling, he didn't seem to have the same painful sensitivity to his every touch, and there was no denying that the mongrel was anxious for release.

"Oh yeah," Riki said. "Fuck me, Iason." He arched his back a little to show his interest, his portal offered more invitingly.

The Blondie, though thrilled with Riki's enthusiasm, needed no additional coercion. Spreading his pet once again, he penetrated, sliding in without resistance into the mongrel's hot, tight, wet grip.

"Oh....pet," Iason said in a broken moan, the first few strokes so exquisite he feared he would ejaculate without meaning to. He reached around and took hold of Riki, his hand still well-oiled.

Riki reacted to his stimulation with his typical mongrel articulation. "Fucking Jupiter," he breathed, overcome with the simultaneous stimulation of his master's fucking and fondling.

“Yeah...that’s fucking beautiful, Iason. Your hand...ohhhh...you’re so warm—that oil is—oh fuck yeah.”

Iason loved taking his pet while he was in chains. He didn’t even really know why, only that he did. He was entirely too aroused to last long as he had been fully ready for consummation since the public whipping. That Riki was so excited only added to his stimulation, and Iason—with uncharacteristic abandon—now began vocalizing his pleasure with each thrust, his grunts and moans becoming increasingly intense.

The auditory stimulation provided by his master’s little fucking song sent Riki over the edge. “Yes...fuck me harder,” he gasped. “That’s it...oh yeah...I’m gonna come. Oh yes...I’m coming....” Iason’s hand pumped him with masterful strokes, Riki’s semen shooting out in arcs that rained in ivory trails to the floor.

Releasing Riki, Iason now grabbed hold of his hips, pulling him back firmly as he took him with almost violent urgency, closing his eyes and letting his head fall back as he reached his critical point, his pleasure beyond containment. Riki’s arm chains now jangled with each thrust. From deep within his essence rose up, demanding release, and the Blondie’s extremely erotic vocalization that accompanied his ejaculation made his pet smile.

Iason withdrew, watching his organ slide out of his pet with a profound sense of ownership, savoring the evidence of his acquisition that escaped from his portal like pearly tears. He loved the way Riki had been so aroused even after viewing the public whipping.

Riki straightened up, turning around and holding his arms out as though expecting to be released from his chains.

Smiling, Iason fastened his trousers, then stood with his arms across his chest. “What are you doing, pet?”

“Waiting for you to take these fucking things off.”

The Blondie laughed softly. “And what makes you think I was going to do that? You’re going to wear those for awhile.”

“What! Come on, Iason. Stop fucking around.”

“I assure you, the time for fucking has passed...for now.”

“Why are you making me wear them?” Riki demanded.

“Because,” the Blondie replied, softly, “I choose to.”

“Take them off, dammit!”

“You’re getting dangerously close to being punished again, pet,” he warned, shaking a finger at him.

Riki fell silent, considering, then decided that Iason was deliberately provoking him to prove his “you can’t last three days” theory. He dropped his arms, wondering how long his master would force him to wear the chains.

“There’s a good boy,” the Blondie praised, bending down to kiss him gently on the lips.

“Well, are you at least going to uncuff me from you?”

Iason answered that by removing his cuff and the chain attached to Riki’s collar, but he left the collar on.

“Iason?”

“Yes, pet?”

“You wouldn’t really have me whipped like that...by Raoul, would you?” Riki stared up at his Blondie master, his dark eyes wide.

“That depends entirely on how disobedient you are.” Iason smiled at his pet’s obvious apprehensiveness.

“I don’t think you would.” The mongrel stared back defiantly.

“Oh? And what makes you so sure?”

His pet shrugged, looking suddenly like a little boy.

Iason laughed, bending down close to him. “What, you think you’re so special that I wouldn’t put you through that, is that it?”

“Yeah,” he conceded.

Iason laughed again, this time loudly. “Come here,” he said, pulling his pet to him. Riki rested his head on his chest as his master held him for a few moments. “You...are...special to me,” he whispered, finally.

“Then how come...you won’t take these chains off?”

“Because I like seeing you in them.”

Riki sighed. “You fucking pervert,” he muttered.

His master answered that with a spank to his bottom, producing a yelp that sounded almost like a puppy. Iason laughed.

“Don’t fucking laugh,” Riki growled, “that hurt!”

“Ohhh,” Iason breathed brokenly, “I’m so tempted right now to turn you over my knee and give you a real spanking.”

His pet grew quiet, unsure if he was serious. He snuggled up to master, sighing, hoping to win him over with his mongrel charm. Iason held him close, easily won over.

Raoul's Fantasy

His body still glistening wet from his shower, Raoul walked naked through the house to his bedroom, closing the door behind him so as not to be disturbed. He was quite anxious to attend to a pressing need that had been tormenting him since the public whipping, and though he could have relieved himself earlier, he wanted to do it right—just the way he liked it, slowly, deliberately, relishing every sensation. Getting comfortable on his bed, he spread his legs widely, both bent at the knees, and began stroking his already nearly erect organ, quickly achieving full arousal.

Closing his eyes, the images of the whipping encouraged his project, especially with some minor editing to make Riki the recipient of his punishing arts. He could hear the mongrel begging Iason not to make him go through it, and Iason's firm, unwavering reply, "Not open for negotiation, pet. I warned you."

As he began whipping Riki, Raoul savored every scream, every lashing mark, every trickle of blood. Punishing Riki was so stimulating that Raoul had to slow the pace of his stroke to avoid ejaculating too soon, wanting to delay his pleasure a bit. Then, in a convenient erotic manipulation that transported the whipping post to his bedroom, he watched Iason take his pet down from the post and position him facedown on the bed.

"Do you want me to fuck him?" Raoul asked.

"Let me suck you first," Iason replied, his eyes burning with lust.

His Blondie lover then knelt, his beautiful silken hair trailing on the floor, and pleased him with his tongue as Riki whimpered

pathetically on the bed. Raoul buried his hands in Iason's hair, thrusting into his mouth.

"Oh, Iason," he moaned, letting his head drop back.

Then he pulled out and climbed onto the bed, spreading Riki apart with his hands for full visual of his entrance. His hands covered with blood, he plunged into Iason's unruly pet, eliciting more screams.

"Harder," Iason commanded. "Make him beg."

Raoul felt him from behind, spreading him to pleasure him with his hot tongue, the warm wetness almost too much to bear along with the exceptionally tight inner sanctum of the mongrel, which he continued to violate with a deliciously brutal fuck, and then...

And then...

"Ohhhhh," Raoul moaned, pumping harder for the last few strokes and then suddenly slowing his pace as his thick semen shot up in a white fountain, dripping down his fingers and the back of his hand onto his thighs. The release was glorious, and for a moment Raoul didn't care that it was only a fantasy.

Then, as his senses returned, he immediately began to brood. Why had Iason put him off, after taking his suggestion to bring Riki to the whipping? True, he had fully intended to take Iason had he come over as he'd hoped. But...had Iason guessed his agenda? And Riki...

Raoul found that he was starting to obsess on the mongrel. His experience with Riki—having him over his knee at the mercy of his arm, and then raping him at Iason's instruction—had been one of the single most erotic experiences of his life. And he couldn't forget...how exquisite the fuck was—the mongrel's unbearably tight grip, how he begged Iason to make him stop. He longed for a repeat of the night, desperately hoping Riki would commit some egregious error that required his correction, and that Iason would call him again. Iason had already told him about the paddle—describing his punishment in a cruelly provocative way designed to make Raoul painfully aroused, or so he thought—and then teasing him with the

offhand statement that he “would call him if he thought Riki needed to be paddled again.” Raoul was desperate to get his hands on it and burn new paths of pain on Riki’s immensely fuckable bottom. He’d paddle him so hard, the mongrel would never be able to walk again. Smiling, Raoul began to wonder if he could devise a way to provoke Riki into committing an offense that Iason would deem worthy of the new implement of pain...and hopefully some hard fucking too, with the mongrel tied up and blindfolded...

Sighing, Raoul’s eyes fell on the small multicolored vase that he had wanted to give to Iason had he convinced him to come over—it was an authentic Vergatti, one of Iason’s favorite artists, and had cost him a small fortune, but he knew Iason would love it, especially the scented holographic flowers that swayed hypnotically as if in a breeze. Perhaps he was going to have to take the gallant route, and pursue Iason with means other than sex for a time. He would send the vase over to him with a note. Iason, he knew, would not be able to accept such a gift without paying him a visit in return. And then perhaps Raoul would surprise him by not trying to take him...perhaps he would invite him instead to a concert, or some other event. He needed to win Iason over again before he could pair with him without resistance.

Getting up, he called in Yui, who brought him a small towel with perfect anticipation, keeping his eyes averted.

“Take this vase to Iason Mink,” he ordered. “Tell him it’s from me—no, wait. Let me give you a note.”

Raoul went to his desk and opened his inkwell, then with long, beautiful strokes composed the following note upon a piece of parchment, “Thought you would appreciate this. I know how you love Vergatti. All my love, Raoul.” He blew on it for a few seconds, waiting for the ink to dry, and folded it. Then, lighting a candle and melting a stick of sealwax, dripped the hot, blood-red wax onto the paper, stamping it with his seal. He handed the letter to Yui, with stern admonitions not to let anything happen to the vase or the letter.

“Yes, Master Raoul,” Yui replied, bowing.

“That vase is worth more than about ten of you,” Raoul continued. “If anything happens to it, I’ll cut off your fingers, one by one.”

Yui, quite accustomed to such threats from the Blondie, did not tremble at these words, but merely bowed a little lower. “Yes, Sir.” In fact, though Raoul often threatened him in horrifying ways, he had never really punished him, probably because Yui was always careful to obey him with the utmost exactness and always tried to anticipate his Blondie master’s needs. Though Raoul had never thanked him, he had often sensed his gratitude when Yui thought to bring him something without his asking, or when he prepared his favorite meals, or offered to rub out his shoulders. And for his part, Yui was proud that Raoul was his master; he was handsome and powerful, and a tremendous artist—perhaps the greatest artist alive. Yui ached for his master when he saw how much he pined after Iason Mink. It was one thing he could do nothing about. And in his opinion, there was something wrong with this Iason, if he could not love Raoul, if the rumors were true and the Blondie loved his own mongrel pet instead.

Though Raoul had never punished him, Yui had witnessed countless pets subjected to his arm. The Blondie truly seemed to enjoy disciplining his pets for no reason other than his pleasure. But it had been several weeks now since Raoul had sold his most recent pet, and Yui wondered why he delayed acquiring a new one. In truth, he had always secretly enjoyed watching his master pleasure himself as his pets copulated, and he missed it, especially as it seemed that lately the Blondie was more likely to shut himself up in his room to masturbate, depriving him of the opportunity to witness his pleasure.

Yui took the letter and vase and immediately departed on his errand, reaching Iason’s penthouse apartment on the top floor in a matter of minutes. Daryl answered the door, giving him a little smile. Yui returned the smile. He had always liked Daryl, Iason’s gentle, grey-eyed servant, who spoke with such softness.

“Come in, Yui,” he said, kindly. “Can I get you something to drink?”

“No, thank you,” he replied, afraid to partake in anything without his master’s explicit permission, though a cold drink sounded tempting. Had Master Iason offered it, he would have, of course, taken it. “I’m here on business. This is for your master, from mine—be very careful with it,” he warned. “And he sent a note.”

With shaking fingers, Daryl, accepted the vase, perceiving from Yui’s manner that it was of some importance and probably quite expensive. He immediately placed it on the bar, anxious to have it out of his hands—and then took the note from Yui, placing it next to the vase.

“Would you like to come in for awhile, Yui?” Daryl asked politely, knowing full well Raoul’s obedient servant would decline, as he always did.

“I thank you, but no. Master Raoul wants me back soon, I am sure.”

Daryl nodded. Yui’s perfect obedience was one of his most beguiling qualities. Of course, it was a given that Raoul’s Furniture would be obedient—the Blondie would have it no other way and would certainly not tolerate even the slightest infraction. But Yui was truly exceptional, not to mention beautiful to look at—his shoulder-length, light brown hair hung in intoxicating waves, and his vividly green eyes gave him an unusual, exotic quality. Daryl had always wanted to see what Yui looked like beneath his silk robe—he wore the ancient, traditional floor-length belted robe at Raoul’s insistence—because even though his body was covered, he could tell by his impressive height and broad shoulders set off by his small waist that he was attractive. Katze teased him about his “crush” on Yui, and Daryl was glad he did not seem to mind that he had always been a little attracted to Raoul’s boy. One of the things Daryl loved about Katze was that he understood people and did not get angry over small things that were of no real consequence. Katze did not seem to get jealous—although, if Daryl was completely honest with

himself, he wouldn't have minded seeing him get a little jealous once and awhile.

Yui sensed that Daryl was attracted to him; he had suspected it for some time. It always surprised him, and especially now. Everyone knew that Daryl and Katze were lovers, and Yui found himself fascinated with this fact, wondering what exactly they did together. He knew, from when Iason had called Raoul one night, that they'd been caught with Riki, engaged in a threesome—something he couldn't believe any pet or servant would have the audacity to do. He knew that—much as the thought intrigued him—he would never participate in such forbidden pleasures. It simply wasn't an option.

Bowing slightly, Yui excused himself, departing and hurrying back home.

Daryl looked at the vase for a moment, marveling over the illusion of the holographic flowers and the realistic scent that permeated the room. Riki came wandering in, and was immediately intrigued by the vase.

"Cool," he said, putting his hand through the holographic image and smiling when he distorted it. "What the fuck is this?"

"It's for Iason. From Raoul," Daryl whispered.

Now Riki's expression changed, and his eyes moved to the sealed note. "What's this?" he demanded, picking it up.

"That's for Iason—don't open it."

With a mischievous smile, Riki immediately broke the seal.

"Riki!" Daryl whispered, frantic. "You just broke his seal!"

"Oops." Riki read the note, smiling. "Oh. ALL MY LOVE, RAOUL," he said in an exaggerated, feminine voice. "Oh Iason I love you soooo much! Here are some flowers from me to you, lover boy!"

"You're gonna get it," Daryl warned.

"Fucking Raoul," Riki muttered, tossing the note over his shoulder, and picking up the vase.

"Riki! Don't touch that! Put that back!"

Ignoring Daryl, Riki immediately headed for the balcony.

“Riki! Stop! He’ll kill you...you’ll be in big trouble! That’s...really expensive!”

Daryl ran after the mongrel, trying to step in front of him to prevent his obvious intent. But Riki sidestepped him and reached the ledge, just as a voice boomed from behind him.

“What are you doing?” Iason demanded, hands on hips. He had been in the library when he heard a fuss and the telltale sounds of his pet in the act of disobedience. His eyes moved to the object in Riki’s hands, which he now held over the edge. “Don’t you...DARE...drop that,” the Blondie warned, his voice lowering threateningly as he annunciated each word.

For a moment, master and pet gazed at one another, motionless, each wondering what the other would do. Then, with deliberate rebellion, Riki let go.

And that was the end of the Vergatti vase.

“That’s it,” Iason said, furious, striding toward his unruly pet. “You’re really in for it now, Riki.” Grabbing Riki’s wrist, he turned to Daryl. “What was that?”

“It came from Raoul. He...sent a note,” Daryl said, holding out the note which he had retrieved after Riki had tossed it aside.

“The seal’s broken,” Iason observed. “Don’t tell me you broke a Blondie’s seal as well, pet?” Before Riki could answer, the Blondie froze, with a sharp intake of his breath. “That...was a Vergatti! Have you any idea—oh, Riki. Ohh,” he laughed brokenly, “you are going to regret this.”

Dragging his pet back inside the penthouse, Iason released him for a moment and took off his belt, whipping it out angrily and then folding it in half.

“Daryl. Go down and make sure no one was hurt by that vase,” he ordered.

“Yes, Master,” Daryl replied, shaking his head at Riki’s stupidity.

The Blondie pushed Riki up against the wall and yanked down his trousers. Then, pinning his hands above his head, he whipped

his pet with all his might, furious, eliciting frightened yelps and cries from his naughty pet.

“How dare you, Riki! How dare you defy me! What were you thinking? Have you any idea how much a Vergatti is worth?”

After a thorough whipping, Iason was still so angry that he pulled Riki over to his chair, turning him over his knee.

“I knew you wouldn’t last three days,” he scolded, “but I didn’t think you’d be that stupid. And how dare you break Raoul’s seal!”

Taking off his glove with his teeth and tossing it aside, he continued punishing him with his bare hand, spanking him so hard Riki began kicking and squirming to escape. But the Blondie wouldn’t let up until his bottom was sufficiently red and his pet’s tears and piercing cries were genuinely anguished.

Then, he set Riki on his feet.

“That’s punishment for breaking the seal. Keep those pants down. I’m not finished with you, pet,” he said, rising, and then dragging Riki with him over to the communications center.

“What...are you doing?” Riki said, his first words thus far.

“We’re calling Raoul. He’ll be administering the rest of your punishment.”

“No,” Riki said, his voice trembling. “Please, Iason. I’m sorry. PLEASE...not him!”

“It’s too late for apologies and pleas now, pet. You should have known, before you did something so foolish, what the consequences would be.” The Blondie took hold of him, shaking him painfully. “Didn’t I warn you? Didn’t I?”

Raoul appeared on the screen. “Iason,” he said, smiling, a little disappointed that he had not come by in person. “I trust you got my gift?”

“Actually, Raoul, I’m sorry to say that I didn’t receive it. Riki took the liberty of destroying it before I even had a chance to see it.”

Raoul fell silent, stunned. Riki had truly destroyed a Vergatti? In his wildest dreams, he would never have imagined the mongrel doing anything so blatantly defiant...nor so stupid. His heart beat a

little faster as the ramifications of Riki's disobedience became clear—Iason's pet was in for some serious punishment.

"Of course, I'll reimburse you for your loss," Iason continued, quickly. "But as additional compensation, perhaps you'd like to administer Riki's punishment."

Raoul felt as though he were dreaming. It was as though his fantasy had actually come true. "Don't worry about the vase. But yes," he said with a smile, eyes gleaming, "I would like administer the punishment."

"I've warmed him up a bit already, of course," Iason said, yanking Riki roughly in front of him so that Raoul could see his reddened behind. The sight of the mongrel's punished flesh immediately aroused the Blondie, who fought to conceal his utter delight.

"Go sit in that chair," Iason ordered, pushing Riki away, then turning back to Raoul. "Please accept my apologies, Raoul. I...don't know what else to say. A Vergatti...." Now his voice trailed off.

"No apologies are necessary. Mongrels will be mongrels. When should I come by?"

"Tonight. Let's make it eight. I want him to fret about this all day."

Raoul nodded, smiling. One of the things he loved about Iason was his beautiful sadistic streak. Making Riki squirm all day, thinking about the looming punishment was just too brilliant. "Should I bring anything?"

"Not necessary. I've already decided he's getting the paddle."

Riki, listening to this conversation with a sinking feeling, closed his eyes and groaned upon learning his fate, kicking himself for once again acting without thinking. He didn't know why he did such things. It was as though he were compelled to rebel—as though things just built up inside more and more until finally he exploded before he even realized what he'd done. And now, like a total idiot, he had secured another visit from Raoul...this time with the paddle. He began wondering if there was any way he could escape the evening ahead. Should he attempt to run away? But...his tracer

would ensure that he wouldn't get far, and then his punishment would be even worse.

Iason had terminated the call, and now stood, hands across his chest, staring down at his pet, who sat slouched in the chair with his pants still pulled down to his knees. "Get up," he commanded.

"Iason," Riki said, in a pleading voice, "you're not going to let him fuck me again, are you?"

Now the Blondie grabbed hold of his hair, pulling his head back with his gloved hand. "You're in no position to ask what's going to happen, pet. You'll take what's given, no questions or protests."

"But, I—"

Iason answered him with a hard slap to his face. "What did I just tell you? Hush." Now he pushed his pet toward the bedroom, still holding him by the hair.

"Lie facedown on the bed."

A little surprised with his master's roughness, Riki obeyed, his pants still submissively lowered to his knees. Iason drank in the sight of his well-spanked bottom, his lust suddenly spiking beyond control. He undressed and then climbed on top of the mongrel.

"I'm going to loosen you up a bit," he whispered, probing him until he gained entry, then opening him with violent, angry thrusts. Riki voiced his discomfort with the Blondie's harsh manner, begging him to be gentle.

"You want me to be gentle? After you destroyed a priceless work of art—a Vergatti no less—that was sent to me as a gift? This is punishment, too, pet."

"He only sent it to you because he wants to fuck you," Riki growled. "And you fucking know it."

"That's none of your concern, Riki," Iason said through gritted teeth, thrusting harder, and starting to feel his essence rising.

"I can't believe you invited him over again."

"And I can't believe you...disobeyed me again." Now the Blondie began gasping. Riki was so sweetly tight, it was unbearable.

Riki started to speak again and Iason, tired of his pet's complaints, covered his mouth with his hand as he moved into his

final stretch, now grunting with each stroke, his need mounting precipitously, and then, with a low moan, he felt the indescribable pleasure of his release, and the glorious denouement of a good fuck.

He withdrew and immediately saw that his pet was aroused, groping himself almost pathetically. Iason smiled, knowing that Riki would not be able to consummate his efforts without his permission, because the pet ring restrictions were activated.

“Please,” Riki begged, “I need to come, Iason.”

“Oh, you want to come? What makes you think you deserve that privilege?”

Moaning, his pet writhed on the bed. “You’re torturing me.”

“I suggest you stop touching it. You’re only making it worse for yourself.”

“I can’t...help it,” Riki groaned, stroking his completely rigid erection, thrusting pathetically into his hand. “Oh, fuck! Let me come already!”

Iason smiled. “Would you like me to suck you for awhile?”

“Quit torturing me! Not if you won’t let me come!”

“I think I want to suck you,” the Blondie decided, crawling toward his pet like a sleek cat, licking his lips suggestively.

Riki moaned, offering his erection eagerly, despite himself. Iason reached out and grabbed hold of his shaft, his warm, firm hand sending shudders through his aroused pet as he slid it up and down with erotic, tantalizing strokes. Then, pressing his tongue languidly on the tip of his pet’s organ, the Blondie began slowly exploring him with his tongue, as Riki moaned and begged for release. When he finally took him into his mouth, the mongrel cried out.

“Oh fuck, Iason. Have mercy! Fucking let me come. Please. Oh god...let me come in your mouth...please!”

Savoring his pet’s sexual anguish, the Blondie toyed with him a bit longer before withdrawing, taking some satisfaction in Riki’s misery. His pet deserved to be punished and he was going to use every method available to make this punishment his worst yet. He was looking forward to the night, couldn’t wait to watch Raoul

discipline him. He fully intended to let Raoul take Riki again, only this time he would make his pet pleasure him orally at the same time.

With an anguished moan, Riki began pathetically wiggling on the bed, spreading his legs and desperately pumping himself.

"It's no use," Iason advised, slipping gracefully back into his clothes. "You can't come until I let you."

"Fuck you, you sadistic bastard," Riki shot back, furious.

Now Iason grabbed him by the hair and yanked him off the bed onto his feet. "You must really want to be punished today, is that it?" he whispered in his ear. "You're just begging for it. Unfortunately for you, pet, you're going to get your wish. You just wait until Raoul gets here." Now he dragged him into the great hall, where he proceeded to undress his pet, quite against his will. He put him in his chains, fastening him by his collar chain to the iron pole in the corner of the hall.

Then, pouring himself a glass of wine, Iason sat down in his favorite chair, watching his pet pace restlessly, angrily pulling on his chains as though hoping to free himself.

He laughed softly. "You can't escape from those chains, Riki. I suggest you calm yourself."

"Shut up, you fucking asshole!"

"My second bit of advice to you," Iason continued, sipping his wine, "is that you refrain from insulting me before I've decided on the extent of your punishment. It's completely up to me what's going to happen tonight. Sometimes...you really are quite foolish, pet."

Riki fell silent, knowing Iason was right and hating him for it. Yet he was so angry he found it difficult to restrain himself.

Iason chuckled. "You really are quite adorable when you're angry."

His pet glared at him, furious.

"So. It seems I was right. You couldn't last three days, could you? And now you're in for the punishment of your life."

After a moment, Riki changed his tone, attempting to persuade his master into modifying his sentence. "Master Iason," he said, sweetly, "I know I was a...naughty pet." Now his voice changed, as he genuinely pleaded with his master. "But...please, please don't let him punish me with that fucking paddle. What about the G-strap?"

Iason smiled at his pet's transparent obsequiousness. "You are in no position to negotiate the terms of your punishment, pet. I've already decided you're to be paddled, just like I promised you when you were punished the last time."

"But...can't you do it?" Riki begged. "Why does it have to be...him?"

"Because Raoul was the one most harmed by your ridiculous antics," Iason answered. "Riki, it's already settled that he's going to punish you tonight, WITH THE PADDLE, so there's nothing else to discuss."

"But—"

"Not open for negotiation, pet," he said, firmly.

Riki sulked at this, retreating to the corner. He sat down, pulling his legs up and burying his face on his arms.

"So, now you're pouting," the Blondie observed. "This might be a good time for you to reflect that you brought this on yourself. You act as though I'm being unfair, when I made it perfectly clear to you what would happen if you disobeyed me again. No one forced you to break that seal and throw a priceless work of art off the balcony. You chose disobedience and therefore, you chose the consequences."

"All right," Riki finally growled. "I fucking get it. Why don't you shut up already?"

Iason laughed again. "Again, your timing for insults astonishes me. Or perhaps you're hoping for even more punishment than I had originally intended to give?"

Now his pet grew quiet, forcing himself to bite his tongue before he got himself into further trouble.

Iason continued to berate him and scold him, hour after hour. He had always believed that correction began with verbal

admonitions backed up by physical discipline, and he rather enjoyed scolding his pet and frightening him about the impending punishment.

“You’re really going to wish you’d listened to me,” he admonished, sipping his wine. “Raoul’s going to do some damage with that paddle. Have you forgotten already how much you hated it? How much you begged me to stop? What did I tell you was going to happen, if I had to call Raoul?”

Riki shrugged, feigning disinterest.

“I told you I’d let him strike you as many times as he wanted. And if I know Raoul—and I think that I do—you’re in big trouble, Riki.”

His pet shuddered, despite himself. He desperately wished Iason would stop talking about what was going to happen.

“And I must say, I’m certainly going to enjoy watching you get what you deserve,” Iason whispered.

That’s because you’re a fucking pervert, Riki thought, but managed to keep the thought to himself. He was thinking ahead now to the night. There was nothing he could do about the paddling, but now he was thinking about how much Raoul had hurt him last time when he had fucked him. If there was some way he could prepare himself for that....

“Master Iason?”

“Yes?” Iason smiled at Riki’s attempts to placate him by calling him “Master.”

“May I...hold the taming stick for awhile?”

Iason blinked. “What do you want that for?”

“I want to ponder my transgressions and...reflect on how lucky I was that you didn’t cane me with it.”

The Blondie studied him for a moment with a little smile. His pet was up to something, but he wasn’t sure what. Deciding to humor him, he rose and retrieved the taming stick, walking over to his pet and, very slowly, handing it to him.

Riki took the stick, looking up at him with wide eyes. “And...could I have some oil?”

Now Iason threw back his head and laughed. "I see. So you intend to prepare yourself for tonight, is that it?"

"He's got the biggest fucking dick I ever saw," Riki muttered. "Bigger than you, even."

"So what you told me just now was a complete lie about pondering your transgressions."

"Not exactly," Riki protested. "I just wanna ponder all that while I stick this up my ass a bit."

The Blondie, deciding that it would be amusing to watch his pet's pathetic attempts to prepare himself for Raoul, gave Riki his vial of oil and sat back down to watch the show.

His pet carefully oiled the stick and then, unable to resist, stroked himself a bit, shuddering and moaning. He wanted to come so badly, he could hardly stand it. Forcing his hand away from his tormented cock, he simply sat for a moment, his erection throbbing almost comically as he gritted his teeth, trying to rein in his arousal. Then, laying onto his back and pulling his legs up to his chest, he slowly inserted the taming stick, wincing from the tears Iason had already gifted him that afternoon.

Iason watched his pet's self-insertion project with fascination, feeling a surge of carnal excitation as Riki began fucking himself with the taming stick, his erection rock hard and twitching, his chains jangling with his movements. The Blondie adjusted himself, tempted to masturbate but deciding to wait for the evening. Whether his pet's attempts to loosen himself for Raoul were effective was uncertain, but in the process Riki had managed to completely torture himself with unconsummated lust.

"Please, Iason," he pleaded. "I'm begging you. Let me come. I'll do anything."

"No, pet," he answered, softly. He looked at the clock. "He'll be here in any minute."

With a groan, Riki removed the taming stick and tossed it into the corner. "You might...wanna wash that at some point," he advised.

Smiling at his pet's ability to have a sense of humor at the eleventh hour, Iason rose to his feet, and poured himself another glass of wine.

The door buzzed, and Daryl rushed to answer it, letting Raoul in.

"Come in," Iason beckoned.

"Iason." Raoul nodded, his eyes then moving to Riki, thrilled to see the mongrel naked and in chains. He walked toward him, slowly, his dark blue cloak swaying with each step. "So, mongrel," he said, his eyes glimmering, "you destroyed my Vergatti?"

"He threw it off the edge of the balcony."

"How very dramatic." He turned back to Iason. "Have you an agenda?"

"Would you like a drink while we discuss it?"

"A cognac would be nice," Raoul answered, smiling.

Daryl moved to retrieve the wanted drink and Raoul and Iason sat down, comfortably chatting as though the visit was purely social.

"So...the paddle, then?"

"That's my thinking. He seemed to find it quite unpleasant. Actually," Iason said, with a little laugh, "I'm rather surprised he's disobeyed me this quickly, considering how much begging he did the last time I used it."

Raoul smiled, enjoying this imagery. "I've told you, Iason. You can't tame a mongrel. But...I'll certainly give it a try. Can I see it?"

"Sir Raoul," Daryl said, offering him the cognac, which Raoul took without acknowledging him.

"Daryl. Bring me the paddle," Iason ordered.

Bowing his acquiescence, the grey-eyed youth went to retrieve the wanted implement, hesitating before picking it up. He shivered, feeling sympathy for Riki despite his stupidity. He delivered the massive, intimidating paddle to his Blondie master, who took it with a smile, showing it to Raoul.

Raoul laughed. "That should do nicely." He was surprised that Iason had made such a formidable acquisition.

"Actually, Riki picked it out himself."

“Is that so?” Now both Blondies acknowledged Riki, who had watched this exchange with an uncomfortable sense of foreboding. Raoul was not a little impressed with the mongrel’s choice, knowing that such a selection betrayed an untamed remnant of pride, pride that Raoul couldn’t wait to beat out of him. He held out his hand to Iason, smiling. “Let me see it.”

Iason handed him the paddle, and Raoul turned it over in his hands, examining it. The holes were ingenious. He smacked it against his hand, smiling at the sting. He spun it around a few times and caught it, taking a few practice swings through the air. Riki sulked as he watched this performance, now desperate to be anywhere else in Amoi but where he happened to be at that moment, about to come under the arm of Tanagura’s most feared master of pain.

“How many strikes?” the Blondie asked.

“Let’s just play it by ear.” Iason took a sip of wine, fully cognizant of his pet’s discomfort and enjoying every minute of it.

“And...afterwards?”

“I was thinking something similar to last time. He seemed to find that particularly distasteful.”

Raoul nodded, trying to hide his glee. It was turning out to be a night of pure bliss. Just thinking of the evening ahead was arousing him; he spread his legs a little more apart and was forced to adjust himself, a movement not lost on Iason, who smiled, similarly affected.

Riki was in the mortifying position of having a permanent erection despite his growing horror concerning the punishment in store for him. His arousal was confusing him. He buried his head in his arms, pulling his legs closer to his body.

Raoul studied him for a moment, then leaned toward Iason. “He’s aroused,” he whispered, puzzled and intrigued.

“I have his pet ring restriction on. He’s been begging for release for hours.”

With a low laugh, Raoul communicated his delight with Iason’s barbaric sadism. Riki glared at him, decidedly unamused.

Raoul returned his gaze, his manner now serious, eyes glimmering menacingly. He took another sip of his cognac and set it down, firmly, then swatted his thigh suggestively with the paddle. "Well then. Shall we begin?"

Rising to show his consent, Iason walked toward Riki, who remained in the corner, eyeing him with a look of dread and fear. "On your feet, pet. It's time for your punishment."

When the mongrel hesitated, Iason strode over to him, forcing him to his feet by his neck chain. "When I tell you to do something, you'll do it," he warned.

"Please," Riki whispered, "don't let him do this. Please...Master Iason." He pleaded with Iason for several minutes, his voice wavering, as the Blondie stared down at him impassively, one hand on his hip.

Raoul laughed. "Is he begging already? What happened to all that mongrel pride?" He removed his cloak, his thin bodysuit revealing every bulging muscle in his beautiful body. Raoul had pumped up before coming over and the fabric strained to contain him.

"Surely you didn't think I'd let you off just because you started begging," Iason replied, noting his pet's trembling with pleasure. "There's nothing you could say or do that would save you now, pet." He unfastened his collar chain from the post and led him over to the dining room table.

"Bend over," he commanded, helping his pet with this task by pushing his chest firmly onto the table. Iason retrieved his wine and found a seat where he had a good side view of his pet. He wanted to watch Raoul as well as see Riki's face. He nodded to Raoul. "All yours."

"Pet!" Raoul bellowed so loudly that Riki started. He held the paddle in both hands, swinging through the air as though practicing. "Do you know who Zavo Vergatti is? He happens to be one of the most sought after artists of our day. Each of his pieces is unique, irreplaceable—and VERY expensive. The vase you broke so maliciously cost more than two million credits. So...you can imagine

my complete SHOCK,” now Raoul moved close to Riki and swung with all his might, striking his bottom with a loud whack that elicited a long, anguished cry from the mongrel, “when Iason said you had destroyed it.”

“Oh fuck,” Riki whispered, unable to believe the pain Raoul had generated with just one swing.

Whack! The mongrel cried out again, terrified, his bottom burning unbearably.

“So that’s why I’m having a little difficulty determining just how I can adequately punish you.” Whack!

Riki screamed in complete agony, turning to Iason. “Please help me! Please!”

Whack!

“Fucking help me!”

“Pet, I’ve told you. I warned you what would happen.” Iason took a sip of his wine as if completely unaffected by his pet’s misery.

Whack!

“Pleeaase! Oh god!”

Raoul was exulting in Riki’s anguish, thrilled with his appeals to Iason for help. Unable to take it, Riki suddenly darted, trying to escape Raoul’s brutal arm. The Blondie easily restrained him, and Iason rose and came to his assistance, pinning his pet’s arms to the table.

“Now you’re really in for it,” Raoul warned.

Both hands gripping the paddle for maximum force, he whipped his arms back and swung with deadly aim, delivering one excruciating blow after another to the mongrel’s unfortunate backside.

Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack! Whack!

Riki screamed.

Whack!

Iason now watched his pet carefully, beginning to feel a little pity for him. Raoul had drawn blood and continued to swing mercilessly, his body twisting to deliver maximum impact, the muscles in his thighs and arms bulging with each strike.

Whack!

“Jealous,” Riki cried, sobbing, looking up into Iason’s eyes.

“Raoul.” Iason held up his hand to stop the punishment. Raoul, who was breathing hard, was glad for the rest, though a little disappointed that the paddling had halted. He turned the paddle around in his hand, smiling at his handiwork—the mongrel’s bottom was raw and bleeding.

“What did you say, pet?” Iason demanded.

“I...was...just...jealous,” Riki replied, through choked sobs, trying to regain his composure but unable to.

“Jealous?” Iason smiled. “Of Raoul?”

“Yeah.” His pet looked so pathetic, bent over the table in chains, face tear-stained, bottom newly paddled by his nemesis.

Iason was thrilled that Riki had admitted his disobedience was due to jealousy. Suddenly he felt ready to move onto the next phase of the evening. “Let’s take him into the bedroom now.”

Raoul hesitated only momentarily. After administering such deliciously brutal punishment, and then hearing that Riki was jealous of him, the Blondie was now painfully aroused, eager to discipline Iason’s pet in more intimate ways. Tossing the paddle aside and pulling the mongrel to his feet, he led him roughly to the bedroom.

For all his punishment and fear of Raoul, Riki now found that he was excited, anxious for the “bedroom” part of his punishment to commence, and desperately hoping Iason would have mercy on him and let him release his painfully pent-up lust.

His excitement did not go unnoticed by the Blondies, who exchanged amused glances as they began undressing. Riki stole a look at Raoul, impressed with the Blondie’s physique, and understanding from the size of his bulging muscles how he had delivered so much pain. His erection twitched in response to the visual stimulation of his punisher’s naked body and he looked away, ashamed that Raoul had garnered his admiration.

Raoul picked him up and tossed him onto the bed, the mongrel’s chains jangling noisily, then slid him to the edge, pulling

his hips up. "On your knees," he instructed. Then, pushing Riki's legs apart with his knee to position him exactly where he wanted him, Raoul stood behind him and spread him apart firmly to reveal his portal, his hands wet from the mongrel's blood. He glanced up at Iason, who gave him a nod, and then, gritting his teeth, penetrated him fully, groaning from Riki's tight and surprisingly lubricated grip, which caused him to slide in quickly.

"Ohhh," he breathed, withdrawing and then thrusting, hard, again. Surprisingly, although Riki cried out, it did not seem to be from pain. While part of him was disappointed, Raoul was intrigued by the mongrel, who—unless he was wildly mistaken—appeared to be bucking back against him, inviting entry.

Iason, who had moved around to Riki's front and could see his facial expressions, knew even better than Raoul that his pet was aroused and soliciting Raoul's sex. The mongrel's eyes were glazed over with lust, his mouth was open, and now he offered master an unmistakably provocative look. Shivering, Iason positioned himself in front of his pet.

"We seem to have a problem, Raoul," Iason said, softly. "Riki is enjoying this too much for it to be punishment." He pressed his own rigid erection against his pet's lips, gasping when Riki pleased him with exaggerated licks, obviously eager to please him.

Raoul closed his eyes, feeling overwhelmed with the eroticism of the situation, naked with Iason and his mongrel pet, fucking Riki who, bewilderingly, seemed to want it—this same pet who so recently wept when Raoul took him for the first time. Grabbing the mongrel's hips tighter, Raoul thrust harder, deeper, feeling as though he couldn't get enough of him. And Iason's moans sent shivers through him, as the Blondie knelt before his pet and began thrusting into the mongrel's mouth. Taking it from both ends, Riki almost went out of his mind, desperate for release. He wiggled and bucked against Raoul, and used every trick he knew to pleasure Iason with his mouth—sucking, licking, wiggling, blowing, humming—and his Blondie master rewarded his efforts by stroking his hair, moaning softly.

“Good boy,” Iason whispered, his voice shaking with emotion.

The punishment session seemed to have been completely forgotten as Riki cooperated and pleased both Blondies beyond their wildest dreams.

Iason leaned back, offering himself more intimately to his pet and, reaching back to grab his ankles and throwing his head back, achieved a position few people could, and one that clenched his muscles in just the right way to increase the intensity of his orgasm, which the Blondie knew was quickly approaching.

The sight of Iason’s head thrown back, revealing the enticing hollows of his throat, his back arched and his hair trailing on the bed, was almost too much for Raoul. And then when Iason began his sex cry—a low moan that increased in volume and magnitude to become the single most erotic vocalization he’d ever heard in his life, Raoul fucked Riki with all his strength, the glimpses of his paddled ass providing just the stimulation he needed to join Iason; he grunted loudly with the last few strokes and then groaned through gritted teeth as his seed shot into the mongrel’s tight passage.

Iason, withdrawing, watched Raoul’s expression, and the way his hands trembled as he loosened his grip on Riki’s hips, stroking him, and wondered if perhaps Raoul was enjoying himself...a little too much. At that moment he decided that this would be the last time he invited Raoul over to “punish” Riki. It was now evident that his pet had been a willing participant in the entire affair, his only punishment being the fact that his own arousal remained unconsummated.

From Riki’s perspective, this unfulfilled need to release his lust was nothing short of torture. He had participated greedily in the sex because he had never felt so horny in his life, despite the fact that it was Raoul who took him from behind. Hell, he wanted Raoul to fuck him...he probably would have wanted just about anyone to fuck him, if only it meant he could get off. And of course he loved pleasuring Iason—and his master nearly drove him out of his mind with his arched back and spine-tingling moans. And then when the Blondie finally came....

Unable to resist, Riki now stroked himself openly, moaning. He wanted to beg for release but was afraid to, for fear he would jeopardize his chances.

“What do you say, Raoul,” Iason said softly. “Shall we reward him for his efforts and let him come?”

Amazingly, Raoul smiled. “Do you want to do it, or shall I?”

“Go ahead.” Iason was a little surprised at Raoul’s offer, but intrigued. He lay back on the bed to watch.

Riki, slightly alarmed by this turn of events, looked to Iason for reassurance. He was not completely sure he wanted to be relieved—much as he desperately wanted release—by Raoul. It was all too confusing psychologically. And yet, he was simply too aroused to resist—not that he would have been allowed to resist.

“Lie back,” Raoul commanded. Then, as Riki obeyed—after looking over at Iason once again with a questioning look—he pushed the mongrel’s legs apart at the knees, moving between his legs.

The sight of Raoul so close to his most sensitive and precious region suddenly filled Riki with panic. He bolted, trying to get away, but was easily restrained by both Blondies, who laughed at him. Iason then held his arms above his head by his chains, while Raoul pushed his legs further apart and held them there.

Riki continued to struggle.

“Why are you being so difficult?” Iason said, softly. “We’re trying to give you what you want.”

The mongrel swallowed, afraid to say that he didn’t want to experience this particular intimacy with Raoul—partly out of primal fear of what he might do—and partly because he didn’t want Raoul to be the one to make him come—he didn’t want to give the Blondie that power over him. The sex had been bad enough—he had enjoyed Raoul. Now...to come in his mouth...it was just too much.

Riki’s struggling only made Raoul more eager to pleasure him. Unlike Iason, he knew exactly what the mongrel was thinking—and he relished the thought that he could force Riki to copulate. He wanted to make him beg for completion.

His eyes dark with purpose, Raoul took hold of the mongrel's erection with one hand, noting how wet he was already, and almost pitying him, as hard and swollen as he was. Riki, unable now to manage any sort of restraint, groaned loudly. Raoul smiled, then flicked his tongue along the head and the ridge, eliciting more enthusiastic vocalizations from Iason's excited pet.

Sucking him gently, Raoul took him partway in his mouth, then moved his tongue ever so slightly.

"Oh fuck!" Riki cried. "Fuck yes!"

Although it was not necessary to restrain him now, Iason continued to hold his pet down, simply because he found the sight arousing. Despite having climaxed only moments before, the Blondie was quickly becoming interested in this new situation—what had started out as a punishment session and now turned into a three-way, extremely erotic sexual encounter.

Riki was beside himself with pleasure, but desperate for release. He looked up at Iason. "Please," he begged. Smiling, his Blondie master tapped open the sapphire on his ring and deactivated Riki's pet ring restriction.

"Ohhhhhh," Riki moaned, immediately feeling the difference. "Oh yeah." Excited, he began making little thrusts into Raoul's mouth, who obliged him by taking him in deeply, sucking him as he withdrew.

Iason, while initially aroused by his pet's moans, now began to feel a little uncomfortable with how much Riki was enjoying Raoul's pleasuring arts.

"Perfect," the mongrel breathed.

A sharp stab of jealousy suddenly spoiled the experience for Iason, who decided he'd had enough.

"Stop, Raoul," he said, sharply.

Surprised, Raoul withdrew, looking up at his old lover questioningly.

"What!" Riki cried, utterly dismayed.

"I'll take it from here."

Shrugging, Raoul got up and moved back, sensing that Iason was jealous—but misinterpreting it, thinking that Iason hadn't wanted him to enjoy Riki so much. And it was true—he had been enjoying the mongrel, much to his own bewilderment and now, mortification.

When Riki realized his master was going to take him to completion, he was overjoyed—his delight transparent in his expressions. Iason softened when he saw how happy Riki was.

“I wanna come now,” Riki whispered, excited. “I can't wait anymore...just take me in your mouth and—oh fuck!” now the mongrel cried out, as he immediately ejaculated the moment Iason's wet tongue touched his engorged flesh. “Oh fuck yeah,” he cried, his eyes rolling back with ecstasy. “Holy shit! Oh my god, fucking help me! Fuck yes!” The orgasm was so intense that Riki was almost in pain, his semen shooting in rhythmic jerks into the hot mouth of his Blondie master, who captured what he could with his tongue and swallowed, the rest having splattered across his beautiful face.

The sight of Riki coming onto Iason's face now convinced Raoul that it was time for round two. He had been lusting over Iason and the irresistible view of his portal as the Blondie had bent over to pleasure Riki, on his knees with his ass in the air, and when he slowly repositioned himself to watch him lick his pet, he had witnessed one of the single most erotic sights of his life when the mongrel copulated with Iason's face and tongue. Stroking himself, Raoul now moved behind Iason, running his hands down his back and between his legs, reaching up to touch the Blondie's own developing erection. Arching his back, Iason moaned, giving in to Raoul's masterful technique.

Sensing his acquiescence, Raoul knelt down, spreading him with both hands and exploring him eagerly with his tongue, in exactly the places Iason loved it best.

Riki, having just experienced the orgasm of his life, not to mention having enjoyed some immensely pleasurable moments with both Blondies, found himself fascinated with this new round of

sexual discourse between Iason and Raoul. And, because he had delayed gratification for so long, he found that he was not completely spent, and so began slowly stroking himself, enjoying the show.

Iason had his eyes closed, parting his lips to gasp when Raoul reached around and began stroking him as he pleased him from behind. Inserting a few fingers into him, Raoul began thrusting with just the amount of force that he knew got Iason eager for a good fuck.

“That’s it,” Iason purred. “Now fuck me.”

Raoul shivered, having never heard Iason use these words before. No doubt this was Riki’s influence, he thought. Smiling, he stood up and obliged him, taking him hard from behind as Iason bent over, hands on the bed.

Riki, now quite aroused, began to pump himself, eyes fixed on Iason’s face, his chains jangling with each stroke. When his master opened his eyes to watch him, his heart beat faster.

“Come here, pet,” Iason whispered, urgently.

Immediately obeying, Riki crawled toward him. “What do you want me to do?”

“Stroke me just like you were doing...make me come with your hand.”

The mongrel did so, turning around and sliding underneath the Blondie, with his head toward the foot of the bed. Then, he began stroking his master—and himself—chains jangling wildly— bringing them both to completion at almost the same instant, their cries mingling with Raoul’s groans as he climaxed on hearing them.

Some minutes passed before anyone spoke. None of them had ever experienced anything like what they had just shared together, and all of them were a bit confused by what had just taken place.

Iason was the first to move, rising to retrieve the clean towelettes that Daryl had discretely left just inside the room. As he began dressing, Raoul moved toward him, pushing back his hair to look at his face.

“I never got to kiss you,” he said.

Now that the passion was gone, Riki felt a return of his jealousy, and watched to see what Iason would do, pouting.

"We all need to cool off a bit," Iason replied.

Hurt, Raoul pulled back. Riki grinned and, when Raoul caught his look, he glared at him. "You won't be grinning like that tomorrow when you wake up," he said, confident that he had done sufficient damage to validate his assertion.

Riki, knowing this was probably true, and suddenly remembering why Raoul had come over in the first place, quickly veiled his expression and averted his eyes, hoping that more punishment wasn't on the way.

But Iason appeared to be finished with the punishment. After Raoul dressed, Iason thanked him, rather formally, for his assistance.

Raoul stared at him, hand on one hip, annoyed. "What? Now you're going to be like this? I don't understand. You just shut me off, like you went cold."

Iason closed his eyes for a moment. "Don't ask me to explain what I can't understand myself."

Sighing, Raoul shook his head. "You're so elusive, Iason. I just...don't get you. But," now he straightened up, remembering his plan to seduce him via more gallant tactics, "as you wish. I'll be off now and, if you need me again, you know you can call."

Relieved when Raoul recovered his composure, Iason smiled. With an inexplicable, brooding glance at Riki, the Blondie departed, leaving master and pet to stare at one another in silence.

Iason picked up the paddle, turning it in his hands thoughtfully. "So, pet. I trust you were sufficiently punished."

Riki stared at him for a moment. "What the fuck does that mean? He fucking paddled the shit out of me! Of course I was sufficiently punished!"

"Don't take that tone with me," Iason said, sharply, sitting down in his chair. "Come here."

Since he was still holding the paddle, Riki hesitated, as if contemplating an escape route.

Iason laughed. "Come here this instant or I WILL paddle you."

Sighing, the mongrel crept toward him, his chains dragging on the floor.

Iason pointed to his lap. "Sit."

Riki climbed onto his lap, wincing a little as he sat. "Why...are you holding that?" he asked, eyeing the paddle.

"I want you to take a good look at it, Riki. Because—now listen to me," he took hold of Riki's chin to get his attention—if you EVER do anything like what you did today, I'm going to paddle you until you pass out. Just like the pet at the public whipping."

"No, you wouldn't," Riki asserted, bravely.

Iason raised an eyebrow. "Oh, you think I wouldn't? And what makes you think I wouldn't?"

"Because you'd get Raoul to do it."

Staring at him expressionless for a moment, Iason suddenly burst out laughing, hugging his pet to him. Suddenly overwhelmed with feelings of love for his naughty pet, he nuzzled his cheek, closing his eyes. "You were very good in the bedroom," he whispered. "I was proud of you."

"I was fucking horny as hell," came the mongrel's blunt reply.

"I think you surprised Raoul."

"Yeah," Riki conceded, "he fucked me pretty hard, too."

"You enjoyed it, didn't you?"

Riki paused before answering, unsure what to say. If he admitted that he'd gotten off on the whole experience, would Iason be angry?

"Answer me, pet."

"Maybe a little," he confessed, hanging his head.

A little jealous to hear his pet actually admit to it, Iason now determined, once again, he would never again allow Raoul to be intimate with Riki.

"What, you're mad at me?" Riki's eyes flashed. "You're fucked up, Iason. You really know how to mess with my mind, you know that? What did you want me to say? No, after I had an erection for

five hours so hard I'm ready to burst, I didn't enjoy being fucked and sucked? Come on! And it was your idea! You MADE me do it!"

Iason answered this with a hard slap to his face. "Don't you talk to me that way."

Riki held his face, sulking. "What...do you want from me?" he asked, finally.

The Blondie made no reply, unable to tell his pet that he wanted what was impossible—his love. And in that moment he felt overcome with sadness. Sighing, he tossed the paddle aside and pulled Riki close to him, stroking his hair. Comforted by the familiar gentleness of his embrace, his pet sighed, burying his face in the Blondie's hair. They remained thus for a long while, clinging to one another, each puzzling over the actions of the other.

Iason's Angst

Iason continued to stroke his pet's hair for some time. "Now," he said finally. "We need to clean you up a bit."

"Nooo," his pet whined, burying his face in his master's chest unhappily.

"Hush," Iason whispered. "You're not going to be naughty again already, are you?"

"Hmphf," the mongrel muttered, pouting.

Iason smiled, then called Daryl, who appeared instantly, already prepared with the first aid kit.

"Take Riki to his room and tend to any open wounds. Be sure you use antiseptic."

Riki groaned.

"All right now. Get up," Iason said firmly, giving his pet a little pat on his thigh.

Obedying with obvious reluctance, Riki slid painfully from his master's lap and trudged after Daryl, his chains dragging along the floor. Iason looked at his punished bottom with some concern—his pet had been injured during Raoul's enthusiastic discipline session, the skin broken in several places. He would have to monitor the healing process carefully.

Shaking his head at Riki's disobedience, he picked up a book and then slipped on his new spectacles—a small wire-rimmed pair that had just been specially made for him. Iason had been having difficulty focusing over the past month or so, especially when reading. He had put off doing anything about it because it was unusual for a Blondie to have vision problems; but then—he now

acknowledged—he had always been something of a deviant. He settled back in his chair, smiling when he heard Riki's loud objections to Daryl's administrations.

Suddenly, Riki came running into the room, streaking around naked as Daryl chased him with a cloth and a bottle of antiseptic. He ran in pathetic circle around Iason's chair, his chains hindering his progress.

Trying to hide his amusement at his pet's pitiful attempt to escape Daryl's attentions, Iason slammed his book shut. "Pet!" he said, sternly. "Come here."

Riki stopped, looking surprised to see Iason, as though he had not even noticed his master still sitting there. His eyes widened when he saw Iason in his spectacles—he had never seen him wear them before, and he gaped at the sight of the Blondie in them now, a lopsided smile creeping onto his face. "You look really...cute in those," he whispered.

Flattered by his pet's compliment, but wanting to maintain some semblance of authority, Iason disregarded the remark, reproaching him. "What did I tell you? You are to allow Daryl to do whatever's necessary to clean you up."

"But he keeps trying to put that fucking stuff on it that stings like hell," Riki lamented.

"As he most certainly should," Iason replied. "Otherwise you'll get an infection."

"But it...hurts." Sulking, Riki looked at his master with the eyes of a puppy.

Iason couldn't resist a smile at his pet's ploy to avoid the necessary first aid. Sighing, he removed his spectacles and rose to his feet. "All right. It looks as though I must do this myself."

Disappointed with this announcement, Riki sighed, defeated.

"I'm sorry, Iason-sama," Daryl said, mortified that his master was assuming his duties.

"It's no fault of yours," Iason replied, giving Riki a pointed look. He held out his hand to retrieve the bottle and cloth and then led

his pet by his collar chain to his bedroom. "Lie down," he commanded.

With an exaggerated sigh that betrayed his annoyance, the mongrel climbed onto the bed, flopping onto his stomach with a pout. Iason examined him, shaking his head. No wonder his pet resisted being treated—the antiseptic would certainly be excruciating on his broken skin. He poured some of it onto the cloth and then, using one hand to pin Riki firmly to the bed, began applying it to the needed areas. His pet cried out his anguish, squirming in a futile attempt to escape his master's hand.

"What a fuss," Iason scolded, but softly, feeling sympathy for Riki's misery.

"Just fucking kill me," Riki moaned.

Smiling, Iason continued to apply the necessary antiseptic. "Perhaps next time you'll remember how much this hurts before you do something foolish."

Sighing loudly, Riki made his views on Iason's admonishment clear.

"Might I remind you," his master said, in a low voice, "that you are in a very vulnerable position, pet."

This elicited a few moments of silence from the mongrel, but the hiatus was short-lived. As Iason applied an ointment to his punished flesh, he wailed anew.

"Daryl!" Iason called.

Daryl rushed into the room.

"Go down to the pavilion and ask Yousi for an accelerator with a mild opiate release."

"Yes, Sir," he replied, immediately leaving to retrieve the wanted medicine.

Perking up at the word "opiate," Riki now changed his tone. "What's an accelerator with...whatever you just said?" he asked, sweetly.

"It's an accelerated antibiotic that will help you heal quickly and prevent any scarring."

"But what was the part about...the opiate?"

"I won't lie to you, pet. It's going to be quite painful when I apply it. But you'll feel much better by tomorrow, both from the opiate and the accelerated healing."

"How much is it going to hurt?" his pet demanded, grumpily.

"As much as it's going to," came Iason's matter-of-fact reply.

Riki pouted. "Why do we have to put that on, too?"

"Fussy little pet," Iason sighed, under his breath. "Stop being so naughty and you won't have to worry so much about your precious bottom. Might I remind you that you tossed a two million credit Vergatti off the balcony today? You're lucky I stopped Raoul before he paddled you raw."

"He DID paddle me raw," Riki protested.

"Ohhh no, pet," Iason laughed, brokenly, "I assure you, he could have done much more damage. I must say, I'm a little disappointed. That public whipping didn't deter you from your disobedience in the least, did it?"

Riki fell silent, remembering the horrible display of pure torture he had witnessed, the bloody whipping of the unfortunate pet who had somehow incurred his master's wrath.

"Iason," he said, finally, "what did that pet do to deserve that?"

"He disobeyed his master."

"Yeah, but...what EXACTLY did he do?"

The Blondie leaned close to his pet. "He pestered his master with naughty questions."

"Okay, real funny," Riki muttered. "You don't even know, do you?"

"As a matter of fact, pet, I do know. But I choose not to tell you."

"Why?"

"Because it's enough to know he disobeyed his master. But I will tell you, pet, that you should consider yourself lucky—you've committed far more serious transgressions and gotten off with much slimmer punishment. You ought to be thanking my leniency."

The dark-haired mongrel was hardly in the mood to be thanking his master for his "lenient" punishments, considering the

current state of his tender backside. However, as Iason tended to his tormented flesh, he felt some comfort in the unhurried manner of his master's touch, and the obvious care and attention he gave his wounds. Even the Blondie's low, soft reprimands were reassuring in some way, because the master's concern and love for his pet lay quietly beneath his words.

Finished with the ointment, Iason decided to pour himself some wine and left his pet for a moment, wandering toward the bar. As he passed the great window, he happened to look down and see Daryl by the pavilion, using one of the public terminals. Surprised, he wondered only momentarily what he was doing, almost immediately concluding that he was engaged in a forbidden activity...and with whom.

Walking over to his terminal, he punched in Daryl's ID to retrieve his purchase logs, and pulled up a list of calls made in the last week or so...to Katze.

He sighed.

So. Daryl had been disobeying him all the while. He shook his head, laughing at himself. He had checked the penthouse call logs but not Daryl's purchase logs—something he should have reviewed long before, yet he had foolishly trusted his Furniture of twelve years, despite recent challenges to his authority. Iason still had not dealt with Daryl, or even confronted him, concerning his part in the deception at Serendipity; perhaps that was why he had so boldly defied his master's explicit command not to contact Katze.

Despite his anger and disappointment at Daryl's deception and betrayal, part of him almost admired his initiative and courage...the boy was clever—though not clever enough. But something that had been eating away at him for some time now became impossible to ignore—Daryl was no longer fit to be his Furniture...not if he couldn't trust him. He had begun to notice that, for some time, he had been defying him in small ways; or perhaps it was more correct to say that he no longer cowered before him, obeying his every demand and anticipating his every need. The truth of the matter was, Daryl no longer feared him.

The Blondie knew this was Riki's influence—as well as Katze's. He might have been more disappointed, had he not taken this as a definitive sign that it was time for Daryl to move into a new role—much in the same way that he had redirected Katze—a move that he had been pondering for several months. And ever since the day Daryl hacked into his ring command program, he had been contemplating how Daryl's computer skills could be fully utilized...especially now.

Iason already knew he could use him for Syndicate jobs, but there was something even more important looming—a dangerous, profoundly far-reaching project that had been consuming him for some time, in which Daryl's skills could prove particularly useful. It was an operation of unprecedented proportions, foolish most likely—but not, Iason was now convinced—impossible.

The idea had its conception in the security breaches that had required reprogramming the entire security grid. Iason had puzzled over this for some time, bothered by one critical question: why had Jupiter failed to halt or even acknowledge the security violation? The breach had suggested to the Blondie a second, more compelling question—what if Jupiter could be overthrown, and Tanagura returned to the hands of men?

Iason knew the danger involved in even contemplating such an idea. And, even should such a rebellion succeed, the chaos it would unleash would be, well...unprecedented, at least since the days of the Revolution. It would be trading order for disorder, certainty for uncertainty, government for anarchy. Yet...it would also mean freedom from Jupiter's oppression, and the possibility of this alternative future for Amoi had consumed him for some time, and was starting to tax him physically as well as emotionally. He knew that he alone possessed the power and influence to make such an overthrow possible, and it was a burden that now pressed into his consciousness all too often.

But...all this was purely theoretical—probably absurd—and Iason sighed as he realized that his mind had once again wandered into his revolution fantasy, giving him yet another splitting

headache. For the moment, all that he should be concerned about was that Daryl had deceived him, and that he would have to be punished. Sighing, he logged off the terminal and sat down for a moment, his head in his hands.

So. The only thing he was certain of was that Daryl's days as his Furniture were coming to an end. It was time for a new household member...someone who would fear him and obey him without question or hesitation. Someone he could trust not to solicit sexual favors from his pet. Someone young, preferably newly broken. Someone more like Daryl used to be.

As he considered this, the image of Xian's pet, Juthian, came to mind—the unfortunate pet that had been publicly whipped by Raoul. He knew that Xian was planning to sell him, and a newly punished pet was an ideal convert to Furniture. All it would take was a call to Xian and the boy would be his. Perhaps he would serve as a reminder to Riki as to what his fate could be if he were to continue down his path of disobedience.

His mind made up, Iason put in the call to Xian, who greeted him warmly, thrilled to be contacted by Tanagura's leading Blondie.

"Iason Mink—a pleasure. What can I do for you?"

"I'm calling about your pet—Z540K, isn't it? If you're still planning to sell him, I'd like to purchase him from you, provided you can perform a modification first."

"You want Juthian for your Furniture?" Xian seemed astonished at this, but then continued eagerly. "Certainly. Of course that can be arranged—absolutely. When did you want him?"

"In two weeks. I'll call for him. And I'll agree to your terms, whatever they are."

"Oh, no, please...consider it a gift, Iason," Xian said, hurriedly. "I positively insist. It would be an honor." The Blondie was already bursting with pride, anxious to spread the word that his pet was to become the Furniture of Iason Mink—although he wondered why the Blondie wanted Juthian, who had been so recently publicly humiliated and ruined. But then, as everyone knew, Iason had unusual tastes.

“How is he?” Iason asked.

Xian paused for a moment. “How is he?” he blinked, as if unsure how to answer. “You mean, is he healing?”

“How is...his spirit?”

“Oh!” Xian laughed. “Quite broken, I assure you. He’s rather dismayed that I’ve decided to sell him. I’m certain his days of rebellion are over.”

Iason smiled at Xian’s phrase, “days of rebellion,” comparing Juthian’s behavior to that of Riki’s. He knew full well the extent of Juthian’s transgressions—the pet had been punished for the stupidest of all infractions—opening the forbidden chest.

The “forbidden chest” was a device used by some masters to test the loyalty of pets and their ability to obey commands in the face of temptation and curiosity. The chest was kept in a special place in the household and the pet was instructed never to open it. Any pet that violated this mandate found a message inside informing them that their master had just been alerted of their disobedience. The technique of the forbidden chest was ancient in origin yet continued to be used because its deception was guarded with the utmost secrecy—pets and Furniture who dared reveal its true secret had their tongues removed as punishment. Iason had no doubt that, had he acquired a forbidden chest to test to his own unruly pet, it would have been violated before the end of the first day.

The fact that the boy had been punished mostly for curiosity, or perhaps stupidity—and not for some horrible transgression—made him an ideal candidate for training. The whipping would serve as sufficient deterrent so that additional punishment would probably be unnecessary, in the same way it had for Daryl, but for the occasional infraction requiring firm correction. And, in truth, Iason felt some sympathy for the Xian’s pet, who had endured one of the most barbaric whippings he had ever witnessed at the hands of Raoul. Iason privately felt that the Blondie’s choice of punishment had been far too severe for the crime. And he had been impressed

that Juthian had not begged for mercy, although his cries had been spine-tingling.

Finally, Iason simply liked the looks of the boy—his fair skin and light hair that hung in soft waves past his shoulders, the ends curling provocatively, his blue-green eyes the hue of the Amoian sea, his slender, slight built. It was a shame that Xian had ruined him as a pet with a whipping that would leave horrible scars. But the boy was still beautiful to look at and would make a perfect Furniture.

And as for Daryl, Iason had already settled on his punishment. He and Katze would be disciplined together. He would have to be severe on them because he wanted to entrust more responsibility to them both, and unless he could ensure their loyalty, he could never trust them with what he had in mind. It would serve as a reminder that no matter how much freedom Iason granted them, they must still ultimately obey him in all matters, without hesitation or question.

* * *

“How many times must I tell you not to call me?” Katze demanded, furious that Daryl had once again risked contacting him.

“But I miss you...and I wanted to tell you about what happened earlier—Raoul came over and punished Riki, and then the three of them had sex together. It was amazing.”

“Much as that intrigues me,” Katze said, eager to learn the details, “it’s no excuse, Daryl. Don’t underestimate Iason. He’s going to find out.”

“I don’t care.”

Katze smiled. “You naughty boy. Next time we’re together, you’re getting spanked.”

“Promise?”

“And that’s not all. I can’t get into it now, but I have a surprise for you...and you’re going to love it.”

“A surprise?” Daryl was delighted, jumping up and down like a child. “What is it?”

“You’ll have to wait and see, love. But for now, you get your ass back home. And don’t you dare call me again.”

“How are your injuries?”

“Almost healed. That shit they made me go through hurt like hell but the results are pretty amazing.”

“Oh.” Daryl was a little disappointed, knowing this meant the time for Katze’s punishment was drawing near.

“Now don’t start with that face. I’m a big boy; I can take what’s coming. You know I deserve whatever’s on the agenda.”

“I can’t stand to see you suffer,” Daryl whispered.

“Don’t worry. I fully intend to pump myself up with opiates first,” Katze grinned. “Now, I’m hanging up, so here’s a kiss...goodbye, love.”

“Bye,” Daryl said, just catching Katze’s wink before he cut the transmission.

Katze stared at the blank screen, worried. He knew Iason; there was no way the Blondie wouldn’t eventually find out what Daryl was up to, and there was nothing Katze could do to protect him.

But at least he had an exciting surprise for his lover. He’d gotten the idea after Daryl had been punished with the G-strap. They had left Iason’s penthouse to go to Tanagura Medical, and he had been reiterating how much he’d hated watching Daryl suffer. And then Daryl had made a remark that had intrigued him.

“It hurt pretty awful at first,” Daryl admitted. “But then something interesting happened.”

“What...do you mean?” Katze whispered, his breathing labored from his injuries.

“I started feeling...I started having sexual images, and...strange sensations.”

Katze blinked at this. “You mean...you got horny?”

“Not exactly...well, yes, in a way. I don’t know, I was also in a lot of pain so it was confusing. And...the same thing happened the last time he used the strap on me.”

“It must have been...that G-wave technology,” Katze breathed, pondering the implications. He had decided then that he would do a

little research and see what he could find about utilizing G-waves to enhance sexual pleasure.

And what he found on the black market nearly blew his mind. He discovered that there was an entire industry, mostly centered around Alpha Zen exports, that used G-wave technology to pleasure those without sexual function—including Furniture. A strap-on stimulation devise was worn around the pelvis, emitting G-waves at 10,000 times the level of a pet ring or G-strap, and could literally produce a replication of the pleasure achieved at orgasm. The units could also be fitted with “toys” or organ simulators for even more authentic sexual experiences. Katze had immediately acquired two such units and, unable to wait until he saw Daryl again, experimented with the stimulator, experiencing for the first time since his modification the pleasure of sexual gratification.

It had nearly brought him to tears.

He couldn't wait to give Daryl the experience, couldn't wait for both of them to experiment together. The only drawback, a rather unfortunate one, was that the devices were deemed to be dangerous—the high-level exposure to G-waves was hazardous to Amoiens. For this reason, they were technically forbidden on Amoi. It was this, and this alone, that had prevented Katze from stimulating himself around the clock when he first acquired the amazing device.

But now, to have a means to pleasure Daryl and show him his love in a physical way, was like a fantasy come true for Katze. It was even better than what he had in mind when he had concocted the ill-fated plan to use Riki as a surrogate lover. He knew that Daryl had never even had an orgasm, and he couldn't wait to see his lover's face contort with pleasure when he experienced it for the first time.

So, even though he knew he would soon be severely punished by Iason Mink, at least...he had something to look forward to afterwards.

The door hummed open and Daryl finally rushed in.

"Here it is, Master Iason," Daryl said, bringing the wanted medicine to Iason.

The Blondie took it from him, observing him closely. "That took a bit longer than I expected," he said, softly, knowing full well the call probably had not taken more than a few minutes, but that Daryl would be guilty about it.

"Oh. Yes," Daryl stammered, "and that is my fault—I was distracted by all the punishment devices."

Iason smiled at his lie. "Yes, there is quite a selection, wouldn't you say? It just serves to remind one how many ways disobedience can be punished."

Daryl shifted his weight, looking uneasy.

Iason laughed softly. "Come with me," he said, returning to Riki's bedroom. His pet was moaning a little, and his eyes snapped darkly when he saw his Blondie master.

"That stuff you put on really stings," he complained. "It just gets worse and worse."

"Well, pet. Prepare yourself for more pain," Iason replied, holding up the can of accelerator. "This won't take long, but you won't like it."

"That's just fucking great!" Riki wailed, furious. "Like I can really take any more of this shit!"

"That's enough, Riki," the Blondie chided. "Let's remember how you got that naughty bottom of yours paddled in the first place. It's because you were deliberately disobedient, isn't that so? Or have you already forgotten your transgressions?"

Sighing with exaggerated weariness, his pet fell silent. Iason sat down on the bed next to him.

"Daryl. Hold his arms down," he ordered. As Daryl obeyed, he pinned Riki's back to the bed with one hand while he sprayed the accelerator on with the other, eliciting screams from his pet.

"Fucking stop, Iason! Oh help me!! Oh fuck!"

Although the administration of the accelerator was excruciating, it only lasted a few minutes.

"I hate you!" Riki cried. "You're torturing me on purpose!"

"Now, now," Iason whispered, gently, forgiving Riki his angry words. "It's over now, pet. You should start feeling quite a bit better by tomorrow." He reached out and began stroking his pet's hair and back.

Soothed by his master's reassuring touch, Riki calmed, and after a few moments apologized. "I don't really hate you," he said.

"I'm glad to hear it," Iason smiled. Then, much to his pet's relief, he finally had his chains removed, though encouraged him to remain naked for his own comfort.

Later that night, after they had gone to bed, the Blondie woke to the sound of his pet crying. He snuggled up to him, kissing his tears. "Are you hurting, pet?" he asked, softly.

"Yeah."

Iason reached out and stroked his hair for a few moments. "All right." He got up and retrieved an Opiate-6 to ease the suffering of his pet.

"Take this," he ordered, offering the pill along with a glass of water.

Riki took one look at the pill, seeing the tiny O-6 inscribed on it, and gazed up at Iason with wide eyes. "You're really give me this?" he said, his relief transparent.

"Yes, pet. I can't have you keeping me up all night with your moaning," the Blondie replied, smiling at his pet's obvious delight.

"Oh," Riki exclaimed, after swallowing the pill, "that's...like the nicest fucking thing you've ever done." He reached up and kissed Iason enthusiastically, then lay back down, smiling up at him sweetly.

Iason looked down at him, suddenly feeling a stirring from Riki's affection. "Doesn't it hurt lying on your back like that?" he whispered.

"Yeah, kinda."

"Then...why don't you roll onto your side."

As he did so, Iason pressed his body up against him, being careful not to push too hard against his sore region. His need was now stronger, and he nuzzled up against his pet's cheek, running his hand down his naked body to his hip. "Pet," he whispered in his ear, "I don't want to hurt you. But...I want you."

Riki was quiet for a moment, surprised that his master seemed to almost be asking his permission to take him. He smiled at this, pleased that Iason cared how he felt. Wanting to reward his master's kindness in giving him the pain reliever, he responded by nuzzling back.

"Do you want me to pleasure you some before you take me?" he asked. "I'll suck you and lick you just how you like."

Releasing his held breath with a little moan, Iason began kissing his neck, excitedly. "You're being such a good little pet tonight." He reached down and fondled him, the mongrel responding immediately to his master's touch.

Suddenly feeling raunchy, Riki rolled over, pushing Iason onto his back. "Want me to love you?" he asked.

Closing his eyes for a moment at his pet's choice of words, Iason opened them slowly and replied, "Yes, Riki. I want you to love me."

Riki responded to this by biting and sucking on Iason's throat aggressively, causing him to gasp and shiver. Then, pleasuring him more gently, Riki left a trail of soft kisses along his throat up to his mouth, then prodded open his master's mouth with his tongue and proceeded to kiss him using all his erotic arts, a project which brought them both into full arousal.

He felt Iason's hands on his waist, his fingers gently stroking his sides in a tantalizing manner; his master would have usually explored his backside more thoroughly, squeezing and spreading him firmly, but avoided doing so for fear of hurting his punished pet. Riki moved down and began sucking on Iason's nipples, rolling the hard buds around on his tongue as he scraped his hands sensually down the Blondie's hard body. Iason closed his eyes, his lips parting as he enjoyed his pet's every move.

Sliding down further, Riki tantalized him with soft kisses to his stomach, inserting his tongue suggestively into his navel, causing Iason's muscles to instinctively contract. He got up on his knees, straddling him, and for several moments simply took in the beautiful body of his Blondie master, savoring every line and hollow, every well-sculpted muscle that rippled beneath his hot flesh. His own erection twitching eagerly as he ran his hands down Iason's chest to his waist, Riki shuddered, wishing desperately to be inside him, longing for the tantric squeeze of the Blondie's inner sanctum.

He slid his fingers expertly to the hollow below his pelvic bone, the place that he knew excited his master most deliciously. Iason moaned, his eyes glimmering with lust. The Blondie reached for him and Riki, with a naughty smile, grabbed his wrists and pinned them to the bed. Iason, thrilled with his pet's playful spirit, but desperately wanting to touch him, glared at him with mock sternness.

"Someone wants another spanking," he threatened. "Release me or face the consequences."

"Are you saying you can't get away? What happened to all that famous Blondie strength?"

Iason immediately escaped Riki's grip and grabbed him by the wrists, pulling him down for a kiss. "I warned you, pet," he whispered. "You'll get that spanking. But I'll just wait a day or so to claim it— when you least expect it."

"Oh yeah?" Riki taunted, flicking his tongue tantalizingly into his master's mouth.

The Blondie moaned, pulling him close.

"You like this, don't you? How about if I do this...somewhere else? Want me to fuck you with my tongue?"

Iason groaned, shivering from his pet's provocative words.

"I'll take that as a yes. Turn over. I want you where I can spread you good."

Smiling at Riki's confident commands, his Blondie master obeyed, drawing in his breath sharply when he felt his pet's hands

sliding down his back to his buttocks and then spreading him, his thumbs resting provocatively on his portal.

“Open your legs more,” Riki whispered. “Wider...yeah. Just like that.”

Using both hands, the mongrel pushed the Blondie’s glutes apart firmly, gazing at him for a moment, then began exploring him with his tongue. Iason’s moans and gasps told him his efforts were well received by the Blondie, who began unconsciously wiggling and pushing back against him, craving more stimulation. Riki teased his portal with slow circles until Iason finally called his name out, almost angry. Trying to fight back a laugh, the mongrel then began thrusting his tongue inside the Blondie, as deeply as he could, eliciting increasingly excited vocalizations.

“Oh Riki...that’s it,” Iason gasped, in complete ecstasy. “Keep doing that.”

Slipping in a finger as he continued to pleasure him, Riki now was so aroused that the temptation of having his master’s hot, wet, twitching sanctum within his complete control was too powerful to resist. His own erection demanded attention, begging him for passage into the Blondie’s inner realms.

He withdrew his tongue, continuing to thrust with his fingers, and moaned, biting his lip.

“Iason,” he pleaded, “let me fuck you.”

“Not now, pet,” the Blondie answered, sounding almost irritated. “Keep doing what you were before.”

Riki, with his master’s ass invitingly positioned only a few inches from his face, was completely overcome with lust. He groaned again, loudly.

“Riki!”

“I can’t...help it,” his pet answered, suddenly leaping up and repositioning himself to fuck Iason. Without hesitating, he thrust with all his strength into his Blondie master, crying out from the pleasure of his grip.

Surprised, Iason turned to look back, as though not quite believing his pet’s audacity. “Pet! How dare you disobey me!”

“Just fucking let me come!” Riki begged, thrusting faster, as though somehow thinking he could climax before Iason stopped him.

But Iason was in no mood for games this time, and easily dismounted the unruly mongrel, pinning him facedown on the bed.

“You naughty little mongrel,” the Blondie whispered, stroking himself as he took in the delicious presentation of his pet, arms pinned behind his back, bottom bruised and so thoroughly, uncompromisingly, delightfully paddled. Now there was no question as to which position he would choose to ravish his naughty pet—only one position would do, his favorite—the position of domination. Straddling him as he pushed Riki’s legs together, Iason pressed himself up to Riki’s portal, demanding entry with a few forceful thrusts as the mongrel winced and then cried out.

He ignored Riki’s yelps of pain, the sight of his phallus sinking into the depths of his pet’s punished flesh so arousing that he groaned, then sucked in his breath sharply. “Ahhhhhh yes,” he breathed, his lip curling in a snarl. “What a naughty boy you are...paddled again so soon.” The imagery of Raoul, gripping the paddle with both hands as he administered the punishing blows to Riki’s bare bottom with devastating force now flashed before his eyes, pushing him to new heights.

“You’re fucking hurting me!”

“So...you thought you could take me without any consequences, is that it? When I specifically told you no?”

“You let me do it...that one time,” his pet protested.

“Pet,” Iason said, with a hard thrust, “when I give you an order in bed, I expect you to obey it. Is that understood?”

“Ow! Don’t...fuck so hard!”

“I said,” Iason repeated, this time fucking even harder, “IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?”

“Yeah! I fucking get it already! Oh fuck!”

Now breathing harder, Iason closed his eyes, enjoying his pet’s hot tightness and even his protests, and feeling quite ready to come. Deciding not to prolong matters, he allowed himself to ascend

toward completion, vocalizing his pleasure with each thrust as he undulated erotically against his prostrate pet.

“Ohhhh,” he breathed, throwing his head back and biting his lip. Then, he reached the critical point, his lust spilling past the point of no return, his essence shooting rhythmically into the wet embrace of the mongrel, as he unleashed a groan quite unlike one Riki had ever heard before.

Riki groaned, too, from frustration. After a few moments, Iason pulled out, then lay on his side, his hand on Riki’s back.

His anger evaporating now that his needs were fulfilled, Iason smiled at his pet’s pathetic hip thrusts into the bed. “Would you like to take me now, Riki?” he asked.

Bolting up, Riki looked at him in disbelief. “For real?” he cried, pumping himself excitedly.

Answering with a smile, Iason turned over, offering himself by spreading his legs tantalizingly.

Riki stared at the beautiful Blondie positioned so invitingly on the bed, his heart racing as he considered the perfect curve of his buttocks, enticingly framing his waiting portal.

“Oh yeah,” he moaned, pressing himself eagerly up to the Blondie’s entrance, and then penetrating fully. “Iason, shit. You’re so fucking tight,” he breathed, his eyes rolling back with ecstasy. “You’re...unbelievable.”

He was already so aroused that it didn’t take long to reach orgasm; once Iason began squeezing him, the mongrel was unable to hold back, his body shaking as his semen shot into the Blondie’s grip. “Fuck yeah,” he whispered, hoarsely, feeling almost dizzy from the simultaneous sensations of his ejaculation and the opiate starting to take effect.

Trembling, he held onto Iason’s back for a moment before he withdrew, feeling disoriented but amazingly wonderful. “Ohhhhh,” he moaned.

Iason smiled. “Starting to feel better now, pet?”

“Hell yes.”

“Good. Now let’s both get some sleep.”

“I’m sorry I...fucked you when you told me not to.”

“No need for apologies,” the Blondie teased, “since I’ll be punishing you for that later.”

“Mean fucker,” Riki muttered, but smiled.

“I thought,” Iason said, kissing his neck, “you said you liked it when I punish you.”

“Sometimes...but not always. And NOT when Raoul does it.”

“Is that so? Then when I really want to punish you, I’ll have to be sure to have Raoul do it.”

Riki didn’t answer, thinking about how the “punishment” session had ended, and remembering Iason’s jealousy when he confirmed that Riki had enjoyed being taken by Raoul.

Iason seemed to sense his thoughts, probing him a little more. “But, it wasn’t a punishment when he took you, was it? I think you enjoyed that, pet?”

“We’ve already been over this,” he answered, evasively. “I don’t know what you want me to say.”

“I want you to tell me the truth,” Iason said, though not entirely wanting to hear it.

Riki remained silent, disappointed that Iason was ruining their moment together with his pointless questioning. “No, you don’t,” he said, quietly.

Now Iason’s manner suddenly changed, as he grabbed hold of Riki’s hair and pulled him close. “Answer me,” he demanded.

“Ow! Dammit, Iason! Yes, I liked it. Fuck. Is that what you want? You want me to come out and say it? I liked it when he fucked me, I loved it when he took me in his mouth. I fucking wanted to come so bad—I hated you when you made him stop.”

Furious, Iason released him and rose up, getting out of bed and putting on his robe.

Confused, Riki stared after him for a moment. “Come on, Iason. Don’t be like that. Come back to bed.”

The Blondie ignored him, leaving the room. Riki got up and followed him, a little surprised with Iason’s behavior, which he could only interpret as jealousy.

“You’ve got to be kidding me,” Riki said. “You’re still mad about this?”

“Leave me!” Iason yelled, whipping around to glare at him.

Riki stared back at him for a moment, evaluating the authenticity of the Blondie’s command; was this a master’s order to his pet, or was it an emotional response from Iason, the dark jealousy of a lover?

For the first time since he had come under Iason’s roof, Riki suddenly felt that his master regarded him as something more than a pet—even more than a special pet. The Blondie’s body language—and angst-ridden eyes—communicated not a master’s disapproval, but a lover’s anger.

This was more like a lovers’ spat. And as such, it was something the mongrel could completely get his arms around—a situation that, for once, he knew how to handle. Ignoring Iason’s insistence on being left alone, Riki approached him, slowly. “What’s this?” he asked softly. “Surely you’re not seriously jealous of Raoul? Have you forgotten...how much I despise him?”

Iason turned away, silent. Encouraged, Riki moved closer, resting his hands on the Blondie’s hips, then sliding them up to wrap his arms around him as he pressed his body up against his back. He sighed, burying his face in Iason’s intoxicating hair. “You know I hate Raoul. That’s why I destroyed the gift he sent. I’m so fucking tired of watching him trying to seduce you. And now that he’s taken that paddle to me, I’d fucking kill him if I had the chance. So you don’t have anything to be...upset...about. The only reason things got so...unusual today was because I’d gone so long without coming. It would have been that way with anyone—I was about ready to burst. I would have got off on that taming stick if you’d let me. But I’m not in the least attracted to him. When I think of what happened now I wanna puke...just the thought of that bastard in me pisses me off.”

Smiling, Iason listened to his pet’s diatribe against Raoul with relief, immensely comforted by his words, and thrilled with the way he had come after him, insisting on being heard. He was surprised

with his own reaction and his inability to shake off his jealousy of Raoul. It was all so absurd, given that he had solicited Raoul's participation in the first place. But his punishment had horribly backfired, and the Blondie felt that he—not his pet—had been the one most punished. Now, the way Riki embraced him from behind, softly reassuring him, filled him with such powerful feelings of love for the mongrel, feelings he knew that he could never really express—not to a pet. Yet he longed to turn around and grab him, confess his love for him once and for all, Jupiter be damned.

"Please...please don't have him ever come over again," Riki whispered.

He turned around, and bent down to kiss Riki. "I can promise you that much," he replied. "I'll never have Raoul punish you again."

Thrilled, his pet smiled up at him, a smile so captivating that for a moment Iason held his breath, just staring down at the beautiful face he loved so much, the face of his beloved Riki.

* * *

"Iason. Let me come in." Raoul stood outside Iason's office, speaking into the intercom.

"Can it wait, Raoul?"

"Stop putting me off. I want to talk to you."

The door hummed open and Raoul entered, finding Iason at the bar, pouring himself some wine.

"Cognac?" Iason asked.

Nodding almost dismissively, he walked toward his old lover, despairing in the way Iason refused to even make prolonged eye contact. "Iason. You deposited two and half million credits into my portfolio."

"I told you I would reimburse you, Raoul."

"And I told you not to worry about it," Raoul shot back, his voice rising. "That Vergatti was a gift— not something I wanted you to pay me for."

"I couldn't have accepted it. I would have given it back or else insisted on paying you." Iason handed him a glass of cognac, motioning to the set of comfortable-looking chairs near the window. "Let's sit."

Raoul took the drink, following Iason reluctantly, wanting instead to take him into his arms and make love to him, right there in the office. He was frustrated and angry with Iason, who had been obviously avoiding him ever since...that night.

The Blondie sat down gracefully, looking at Raoul with a sigh. "Raoul. I know I'm to blame for...giving you false ideas about us. But now I want to make it perfectly clear to you. You're a dear friend. And once, yes, you were my lover. But, despite everything that's happened recently, you and I are not lovers now, and are not going to be lovers. I won't be soliciting your...assistance...with Riki ever again. It was a foolish mistake, one that I now regret."

Listening in disbelief, Raoul shook his head. "No. You can't just cut me off like this. I'm not a toy, Iason."

Iason sighed. "You have every right to be angry. I gave you mixed signals."

"Yes. Yes you did," Raoul said, his voice quivering with anger. "And you can't deny, Iason—you can't say you didn't enjoy the sex. We both know you did."

"Oh, I freely admit to that. I've told you before...my body still loves you."

"But...your heart doesn't," Raoul finished, furious. "So who is this mystery lover who's captured your affections? Why do I never see you with anyone? And why the hell does he let you pair with your old lover, not to mention your pet? Or perhaps you're lying to me, making him up just to put me off?"

"I have not lied," Iason said, softly.

"Then tell me. I deserve that much. You know I do."

Iason looked away, silent.

Now Raoul hurled his glass against the wall, shattering it, and stood up, grabbing Iason and forcing him to his feet. "Tell me!" he demanded. "You'll tell me, Iason, if I have to beat it out of you!"

And as if demonstrating the validity of his threat, Raoul struck him, hard, across the face.

Surprised—though it was not the first time Raoul had struck him—Iason lowered his eyes, his cheek burning. “All right. If you must know.”

Raoul waited, his heart beating faster.

Now Iason met Raoul’s gaze, his sea-blue eyes cold with resolve. “It’s Riki.”

Raoul gave a little laugh, his brow creasing in a questioning manner. “What? Are you...joking?” He studied him for a moment and then, realizing with horror that Iason spoke the truth, he shook his head in disbelief.

“No. That can’t be. Are you...out of your MIND?” Nearly screaming the last word, Raoul shook him like a naughty child. “Have you any idea what will happen if—”

“Hush,” Iason cautioned, sharply.

“I can’t let you throw everything away. Not for HIM!”

“Keep your voice down, Raoul,” Iason whispered.

“I’ll speak as LOUD AS I FUCKING FEEL LIKE!” Raoul yelled, cursing in an uncharacteristic way that surprised Iason, reminding him of Riki.

Iason was being buzzed by multiple people on the floor who, hearing the commotion in his office, wanted to know if everything was okay. Iason moved to his terminal and assured everyone that he and Raoul were simply having a difference of opinion. Then he put on some music to mask any further loud conversation from curious bystanders.

Raoul, cooling down a little, sat back down in his chair, his face in his hands. Iason approached him slowly, having never seen him look so upset. He crouched down beside him, putting his hand on his knee.

“Don’t...touch me,” Raoul hissed, grabbing his wrist. “Unless you want me to fuck you right here and now.”

“Would that make you feel better about things?”

“What are you saying?”

“If you want to take out some of your anger on me, you can take my body, but this will be the last time we’re ever together.”

For a long moment, Raoul stared down at Iason, feeling almost angry with his offer. It was just like him to suggest something incredibly provocative like using his body to release his frustration. And that was exactly why Raoul loved him so much.

Then, as if a fury suddenly unleashed within, he leapt to his feet, pulling Iason up as well, yanking his head back by his hair and kissing him hard, hungrily, furiously. Pulling off his glove with his teeth, he stroked Iason’s face for a moment, then struck him again, so hard that the Blondie gasped.

He dragged Iason over to the desk, clearing it with sweeping arm, and then unzipped his body suit with one angry motion, yanking it off to get to the Blondie’s naked body. Slamming him down onto the desk, he spread Iason’s legs and, without further prelude, penetrated him violently, relishing the Blondie’s winces.

“This doesn’t hurt you...nearly as much as you’ve hurt me,” he whispered, his voice thick with emotion. He had Iason’s hair in one hand and pulled his head back painfully. With his other hand, he smacked Iason’s hip and buttocks every so often, as hard as he could.

Iason didn’t answer, but endured Raoul’s brutal acquisition without resistance, hoping that it would help him accept the termination of their relationship. And he felt that he deserved a little punishment. He had certainly used Raoul; there was no getting around it.

Raoul was beside himself with hurt and rage. He couldn’t believe that Iason could be so cold as to play with him so heartlessly. And then to find out that it had been Riki—all this time—who Iason referred to when he spoke of someone stealing his heart...it was too much.

This wasn’t going to be the end of it. He was going to get his revenge on Iason’s mongrel...even if it meant he had to kill him.

Punishment and Revenge

Riki woke up late, finding that Iason had already left for the day. He sighed, stretching, and feeling much better. Iason had been right—the combination of the accelerator and the opiate had done wonders for his soreness. He jumped up and went over to the floor-length mirror that hung on one wall, trying to look at the damage on his backside, and gasping when he saw how much he had healed in one night.

“That’s fucking amazing,” he muttered.

“You’re finally up.” Daryl was standing in the doorway, smiling at the way Riki was examining himself.

“Can you see this?” Riki exclaimed.

“Yes. Your bottom is...very lovely,” Daryl answered, saucily.

“Smartass!” Riki grinned. “Seriously, I’ve never seen anything like it...how fast it healed, I mean.”

Daryl nodded. “That’s the accelerator.”

“That’s...fucking awesome.”

“You didn’t seem to care much for it yesterday.”

“That’s because it hurt like hell. But I guess...it was worth it.”

“You think so? Or maybe Iason just healed you faster so he could dole out more punishment.” Daryl cocked his head, smiling.

“What are you in such a good mood about?” Riki demanded, as he got dressed.

“Nothing...just that...Katze has a surprise for me.”

“You’re not fucking calling Katze from here are you?”

Daryl shook his head. “From the pavilion.”

“You’re an idiot. Iason will find out.”

“You’re...calling ME an idiot?” Daryl laughed. “After all the shit you’ve pulled?”

Riki stared at him for a moment, marveling over his relaxed, confident manner. “You sure have changed, Daryl. I still...can’t quite get over it.”

Daryl shrugged, leaning back against the doorframe. “Have I?”

“Yeah. Most definitely,” Riki replied. You’re more like Katze, he thought, privately. “So...how’s Katze doing?”

“His injuries are mostly healed.”

“So I guess...that means,” Riki started, then stopped.

“Yeah. Iason already called him. He’s to be punished tomorrow night.”

They both fell silent for a moment.

“At least you’ll get to see him,” Riki said, softly.

Daryl hung his head. “Yeah,” he whispered. “I just can’t stand the thought...of watching him suffer.”

“If I know Katze, he’ll practically overdose on opiates before he gets here.”

Daryl laughed. “That’s exactly what he said he’d do.”

The sound of front door opening startled them both. It was unusual for Iason to come home in the middle of the day, and they both rushed to greet him.

Daryl gasped when he saw him, and Riki stopped dead in his tracks. The Blondie’s face was slightly bruised, his lip cut and a little swollen.

“What happened?” Riki demanded.

“Nothing you need to be concerned about,” Iason replied.

“Can I get you something, Master Iason?” Daryl asked.

“Wine, Daryl.”

Daryl rushed to retrieve the wanted drink, while Riki stepped in front of Iason, hands on hips.

“Who did this? Was it Raoul?”

The Blondie shot him a look that answered his guess.

“That fucking bastard! I’m gonna kill him!” Riki yelled.

Now Iason reached down and grabbed hold of his chin, bending down close to his face. "You most certainly will not," he said, sharply. "Riki. Mark my words. You are not to go near Raoul. I cannot protect you if you assault another Blondie." He released his pet and moved toward the great hall.

"Did he...what else did he do?" The mongrel's eyes flashed darkly, as his fury began rising from deep within.

Iason whipped around. "Pet. Let it go," he said, firmly.

"No. No, I will NOT let it go." His pet stared back at him defiantly.

"You WILL." Now Iason's voice rose as he began to get angry.

"But he...he hurt you!"

"I let him hurt me."

Riki shook his head, mystified. "What the fuck are you talking about? Do you mean you played a sex game with him?"

"Riki. This discussion is OVER."

"It's not over!" Furious, Riki kicked over an end-table, sending Iason's books crashing to the floor.

The Blondie grabbed his wrists, and then twisted them behind him as he pressed up against his back, restraining him. "Calm down," he commanded, as Riki struggled.

"I'm gonna...hack his prick off," Riki growled.

Now that Riki could not see him, Iason smiled, thrilled with his pet's protectiveness and rage. But he knew he had to discourage any form of retaliation or his pet would be in serious danger. Though Riki may have been the most feared mongrel in Ceres, he was simply no match for Raoul. Therefore, he would have to be harsh with him, for his own good.

"Pet," he whispered in his ear, "I am giving you one opportunity to settle down and obey me. If you persist with this behavior, I'll be forced to punish you. So we are finished discussing what happened with Raoul, and you are not to go near him or contact him in any way. Is that quite clear?"

Furious, Riki remained silent.

“Answer me, pet!” Iason ordered, sternly. “Are you going to obey me?”

“No, I am not,” Riki replied, coldly. “I’m gonna kill him, like I said—or at least fuck him up like he deserves. And nothing you can do will stop me.”

“Is that so?” Now Iason’s voice was firm, uncompromising—the tone of voice he always used before disciplining his pet—the voice that meant Riki could no longer talk his way out of being punished. “Wouldn’t my keeping you chained up stop you? Are you saying a hard spanking wouldn’t stop you? Let’s see about that.”

The Blondie dragged him over to his chair and turned him over his knees, removing his glove with his teeth and tossing it aside as he kept his arms pinned behind his back with one hand. He tugged down Riki’s pants, noting the healed flesh with some relief, knowing he could unleash his discipline without restraint, though the bruises meant it would be especially painful. That was good; he wanted Riki to hurt, because he was afraid his pet would seriously go after Raoul, a scenario he knew would end in disaster for the mongrel.

“I gave you an opportunity to avoid this, pet,” Iason said, in a low voice. “Maybe next time you’ll take it.”

Hardening himself against what he knew would be heart-wrenching cries, he proceeded to spank Riki as hard as he could, his hand quickly burning from the force of his blows. Riki was completely surprised by the severity of his punishment, and wailed from the pain and, from his view, the injustice of being disciplined simply for caring about his master’s well-being.

Iason had given him many spankings—some delivered as warnings, some playful, some as prelude to further punishment, others hard and brutal. But never had his pet experienced a spanking quite like this one. The bruises from his paddling made each strike excruciating, and his Blondie master simply would not stop. Riki began begging and pleading, promising to obey him long before Iason finally stopped. The Blondie gave him the full force of his arm, pushing past his own pain as his muscles cramped and his

hand burned and ached. Drops of sweat rolled down his face from his brow, and still he did not stop.

In utter agony, Riki began desperately squirming and kicking to escape his punishment, but was unable to do so, though his body language, as well as his brutally red bottom, told his master that his arm was keenly felt.

Finally, when the mongrel's screams became almost eerie, Iason brought the spanking to a halt, but kept his pet bent over his knees.

"So pet. Did that spanking change your agenda? Or do I need to spank you some more?"

"Pl..please," Riki sobbed. "No more. I..won't...do anything. I pr..promise."

"I thought as much. A proper spanking can be quite persuasive, wouldn't you agree?"

His pet answered this with a tearful, incomprehensible reply. Feeling pity for him, but not wanting to dilute the effect of his punishment, Iason set him on his feet roughly. "Go to your room," he said, sternly. "If you disobey me again, you'll be right back over my knee, and I'll chain you up again. I think you know that's not an idle threat."

Eyes filled with misery, confusion, and hurt, Riki shot him a pathetic, dejected look before trotting off as ordered, not even bothering to pull up his pants. Suddenly wishing he could gather him up in his arms, Iason stared after him, comforting himself with the knowledge that Riki would probably not carry out his threat to hurt Raoul. It wasn't that he cared what happened to Raoul—it was that he worried about what would happen to Riki. His pet's threats to kill Raoul had been precious, and this made the Blondie feel even worse that he had been forced to discipline him so severely. Now Riki would be angry with him, which was the last thing he wanted.

Feeling irritated and now wanting to dole out more punishment, Iason called Daryl, who had been lurking nearby with his wine. Daryl brought him his wine and turned to go.

“Daryl. Don’t you have something you want to tell me?” he asked, sharply.

Surprised, Daryl just stopped and looked at him, speechless.

“Perhaps I’ll give you a hint. Would you like to explain why you’ve been calling Katze, defying my explicit orders?”

Daryl hung his head, wondering how Iason had uncovered his deception. “I’m sorry, Sir.”

“You know you’re in for some serious punishment.”

“Yes, Master Iason.”

Iason sighed. “Why, Daryl? After all this time? Why disobey me?”

The youth shook his head. “It wasn’t...like that. It’s just that I missed Katze so much.”

“So much that you were willing to risk my displeasure and certain punishment? Have you any idea what’s in store for you?”

Standing a little straighter, Daryl summoned the courage to look into his master’s eyes. “I’m ready to be punished.”

Laughing softly, the Blondie considered him for a moment. He almost admired Daryl’s willingness to face his wrath, simply to talk to his lover. But his disobedience could not be tolerated. “Is that so? I don’t think you can possibly be ready for what I have in mind for you.”

Shivering a little at this threat, Daryl remained silent, waiting to learn his fate.

“Daryl. You’re going to be punished with Katze. I’m going to whip you both, one right after the other. Each of you will watch the other suffer.”

Dismayed, Daryl felt his face grow hot, his eyes stinging with tears he fought desperately not to shed—more for Katze than for himself—but some for himself, too. He knew all too well the pain of a whipping, and could not believe he would have to face it again, as well as witness Katze subjected to it.

Iason noted his tears impassively, sipping his wine. “Perhaps you should have weighed the consequences more carefully before you acted so disobediently.”

Daryl nodded. "Yes, Sir." When Iason remained silent, he added, "Shall I go now, Master Iason?"

"No. That's not all I have to tell you."

The youth waited, puzzled with the inexplicable look on his master's face.

The Blondie took another sip of his wine, studying him for a moment, then sighed. "I've decided that you will no longer be my Furniture, Daryl."

Surprised, the grey-eyed youth stared at him in alarm. Serving Iason had been his life—and now he was to be sold? He could not even get his mind around it, could not believe his master was so angry with him as to let him go.

"Please, Master Iason," he pleaded, "please...forgive me. Give me another chance." Daryl was terrified at the prospect of serving a new master, devastated at the thought of leaving Iason, who he had come to—in a very real way—care for. And...he'd come to truly care for Riki, too.

Pleased with Daryl's reluctance to leave him, Iason smiled, his anger softening. "It is not just your disobedience that's at issue. I have not decided on this to punish you. It is simply a fact that you are no longer suitable for my Furniture. The incident between you, Katze, and Riki was enough to convince me of that, but I delayed acting out of...perhaps a foolish affection for you."

Daryl blinked at these words. Iason had never, in all the time he had served him, suggested that he harbored any sort of affection for him. He felt flattered and, at the same time, distressed that this revelation came now, when his master was dismissing him.

"Your recent disobedience drove the point home. But, as I said, it was not just your disobedience that motivated my decision. I see something in you—a talent—that I think would be better utilized in a position more like Katze's. We discussed this possibility before, and now I want to move forward."

"A position...like Katze's?" His eyes wide, Daryl listened to his master, not able to believe what he was hearing.

“Yes. You would still serve me, but in other ways. I’m interested in putting your computer skills to better use.”

“Would I still live...with you?”

“No. I’ll arrange an apartment for you in the city. Unless of course,” he added with a knowing smile, “you can find your own accommodations.”

Impossibly, it seemed Iason was telling Daryl that he was allowing him to live with Katze, if he so chose. His knees suddenly going weak, Daryl stepped back, clutching the bar counter. “I...don’t know what to say.”

“Of course, this won’t happen right away. First, you’ll be training my new Furniture. That will take several months, because he’ll be quite useless initially. He’s still a pet, at the moment, about to undergo modification.”

“I see.” Daryl wondered who this new Furniture was, this unfortunate pet about to lose his pampered status in exchange for domestic servanthood, and what he had done to deserve it. His mind was a jumble of emotions; though initially he had despaired at Iason’s announcement, now he began to see it as one of the most exciting things ever to happen in his life—a chance for greater freedom and responsibility, and most of all—a chance to be with Katze. It hardly seemed possible that Iason was giving him this news after he had just promised to punish him so severely.

“Thank you, Master Iason,” he said, finally.

“You may go.” The Blondie now turned and gazed out the window, suddenly tired of the conversation, a new headache coming on.

It had been a trying day. Raoul had left work in a rage, and Iason, aware of the attention their argument had generated, had thought it prudent to leave before his appearance caused even more gossip. He was, in truth, a bit sore from the fury Raoul had unleashed on him; he hadn’t expected him to take his offer quite so enthusiastically.

Raoul had embraced the opportunity with relish, expressing physically all his anger and frustration with Iason, and while it had

given him some release, the spurned Blondie was in no way ready to let matters rest as they were. At home, Raoul paced his apartment restlessly, occasionally pounding the wall with his fist, or hurling an object across the room. Yui watched all this with concern, having never seen his master quite so worked up. He was certain it had something to do with Iason Mink, but he knew better than to approach him about it, and simply waited for Raoul to notice him and want something. If he could have seen into the Blondie's mind, he would have shuddered at what he saw—Raoul's terrifying plans for Riki the Dark.

All Raoul could think about was how he could hurt Riki; how he would go about it, when he could get to the mongrel, how far he would take it. It was simply beyond his conception that Iason could be in love with a mongrel. Though he had finally come to understand something of his old lover's sexual appetite for his rebellious pet, it was impossible that Iason actually preferred Riki to him. It was inconceivable, not to mention an abomination—and Raoul intended to do something about it.

* * *

Riki woke up with a start, realizing that he was in his room, though it was late at night. Iason had not called for him; this was one of the few nights he had not slept with his master since the Blondie began taking him. He winced as he got up, his bottom tender and sore. Quietly, he walked through the penthouse in search of Iason, who wasn't in his bedroom or in the great hall. Next he tried the library, and found his master there, asleep in a chair, a book on his lap.

He smiled, adoring how Iason looked in his spectacles, fast asleep. But he also noted the bruising on his cheek with concern—and not a little anger. Fucking Raoul. Iason may have prevented him from doing anything immediately, but Riki was resolved to pay the Blondie back somehow. He wondered what had happened between them and why Iason refused to tell him about it.

Settling down at Iason's feet, he laid his head against his master's thigh, desperate for some affection. He had spent the afternoon and evening alone in his room, his bottom smarting from his spanking, and gone through an entire symphony of emotions, from hurt and anger, to confusion and betrayal, to misery, loneliness, and despair. Hour after hour, Iason did not come, and he had been wounded by that, more than anything, though he also obsessed over his hatred for Raoul. Finally, he had drifted off into a fitful, troubled sleep.

Iason woke, finding Riki snuggled up against his leg in a manner so endearing he couldn't help but smile. He reached down, stroking his hair. The Blondie had just awoken from an erotic dream involving the dark-haired mongrel who now curled up at his feet.

Riki looked up at him, eyes wide. "Are you still mad at me?"

"No, pet. As long as you obey me." Iason removed his glasses, and his gloves, setting them down on the end table next to him, along with his book.

The mongrel sighed. "I'm hungry. I didn't get any dinner."

"Daryl left something for you in the kitchen. But...don't go yet." Iason stroked his face for a moment, silent.

His pet gazed back at him, trying to ascertain his mood. "Do you...want something?"

"Yes," he whispered, eyes shining.

His pet waited, his eyes instinctively lowering to determine exactly how much his master wanted it. The Blondie's arousal clearly evident, Riki watched as Iason slowly unfastened his trousers, revealing his impressive erection as he spread his legs apart suggestively. He gazed down at his pet, his eyes smoldering with undeniable intent.

With deliberate, unhurried firmness, he took hold of Riki's hand, guiding it to his shaft, then showing him with a few strokes how he wanted to be pleased. Iason appeared to be in a strange mood, wanting something a little different—the pace slower than usual—tantalizingly sensual and intense.

Riki complied, eager to please Iason and earn his praise, still stinging from his master's discipline— his heart more than his body. Iason's erotic manner excited him, the way he was staring down at him so intently, his head resting on the back of his chair, his thighs spread apart comfortably, his immense organ twitching with Riki's every stroke.

The Blondie did not speak, but as Riki touched him, he continued stroking his hair and face gently, his warm fingers moving to press against his lips. Then, he slid his hand around to the back of his head, drawing him closer, making his desire clear. With one hand around the base of his shaft, he pressed himself up to Riki's lips.

"Just relax," Iason said. "Let me do it."

"Do you want me to—," Riki began, then stopped, uncertain.

"I'll tell you want to do." The Blondie rubbed the tip of his erection against Riki's lips, parting them slowly. "Open your mouth a little," he whispered.

His pet obeyed, intrigued with this new method of oral exploration.

Iason grabbed hold of the mongrel's soft, dark hair, pulling his head back gently. "Just let me press against your tongue," now Iason drew his breath in sharply, "yes, love, just like that. Now, close your mouth around me...that's it. Yes."

Now Riki was desperate to begin sucking and pleasuring Iason in the way he was accustomed to, yet delighted in his master's game of controlled stimulation. Feeling his own lust mounting, he reached down and adjusted himself.

Thrusting very slightly against his tongue, Iason now had the head of his near-bursting organ in his pet's mouth. "Suck me...gently."

Riki obeyed, moving his hands up to Iason's thighs and raking them across his skin-tight body suit, delighting in the rock-hard muscles beneath, and the way his master had spread his legs so widely.

“Move your tongue.” Finally allowed to practice his pleasuring arts, Riki unleashed an erotic lingual dance on his master’s intoxicatingly hard cock, desperate for the Blondie to penetrate him completely, deeply, wanting to feel him bump up against the back of this throat where he could hook him and bring him quickly to completion.

Now Iason parted his lips, breathing a little more deeply. “Ohhh, pet,” he murmured, closing his eyes. Releasing his hair and placing both hands on his head, he began thrusting a little deeper into the mongrel’s mouth, groaning with each thrust.

Riki now slid a hand down his pants and began stroking himself, anxious for release.

“Relax your head in my hands—don’t move,” he commanded, opening his eyes. He held Riki’s head in his hands and began thrusting at the pace he desired, enjoying, as always, a good fuck in the mongrel’s mouth.

His pet, hoping his master’s command did not pertain to his masturbatory manipulations, continued to pleasure himself.

“I told you not to move,” the Blondie chided. “Stop touching yourself.” Then, more softly, he added, “I’ll take care of you—don’t worry.”

Appeased and stimulated by his master’s promise to “take care of him,” Riki moved his hands up to Iason’s thighs again, stroking him passionately, longing to touch the Blondie’s bare flesh, to have his nude body pressed close to his own.

“Suck a little harder,” Iason demanded, then moaned. “Ohhh, yes. That’s it. Perfect...just like that.” He thrust now more violently and deeply into his pet’s mouth, his need rising with each stroke, his pleasure spiraling out of his control, the warm wetness of the mongrel’s mouth too delicious to resist any longer. With a series of gasps and exclamations announcing his imminent release, the Blondie closed his eyes and then, groaning through gritted teeth, ejaculated, his semen filling the mongrel’s mouth.

“Swallow me,” he whispered, through half-closed eyes, vocalizing his pleasure with a soft moan as he withdrew—just as

Riki obeyed, savoring his master's essence, and licking the tip of his organ to recover any remnants of his release.

"Riki," Iason murmured, softly, almost sighing.

"Was that acceptable, Master Iason?" Riki replied, a little saucily.

The Blondie smiled at his pet's teasing by calling him—as he properly should yet rarely did—Master. "It was quite satisfactory."

"What the fuck does that mean?" Riki demanded. "Satisfactory, that's it?"

Iason laughed, pulling Riki closer so he could kiss him. "It was perfect, my pet," he said, then kissed him slowly, savoring the taste of himself still in the mongrel's mouth.

Riki responded to this kiss eagerly, running his hand through Iason's soft hair, anxious to be "taken care of."

The Blondie took hold of his chin, looking into his eyes. "Now. What would you like, my love?"

The mongrel thought for a moment. He had wanted to get into bed with Iason, but suddenly realized he was far too aroused—he needed immediate release. "I want the same as you," he decided, finally. "Except...I won't last as long."

Iason smiled at this, knowing full well how easily Riki became aroused and how quickly he reached completion. It was one of the things he loved about him. There was now never any doubt that his pet would be an enthusiastic partner when it came to sex, although, of course, it had not always been that way in the very beginning. Yet even when the mongrel had been forced to perform for him in their early days together, Riki had aroused and released himself with astonishing speed...and frequency.

He rose, exchanging places with Riki, who had already unzipped his pants and pulled them down a little to reveal his considerable arousal. His pet sat down in the chair, smiling, as Iason positioned himself between his legs.

Then, not even sure why he did it, Iason firmly spread Riki's legs apart, pulling him down to position him better in the chair as he gazed purposefully at him, exactly replicating Katze's distinctive

style. His pet gasped—partly from the sliding trauma to his sore bottom—but even more so from Iason’s move, which he immediately recognized as Katze’s.

For a long moment, master and pet stared at one another, Riki slowly comprehending that his master had been with Katze, and that this was his way of letting him know. The Blondie saw from Riki’s look that his pet had definitely remembered Katze’s erotic arts, had recognized the move, and therefore, had been affected by it when he had first experienced it.

Neither of them spoke about it, but in that moment something was communicated between them, something powerful—each of them looking into the heart of the other with nothing to restrict their view, if only for that brief moment. Each of them saw hurt, jealousy, and the strength of their attachment to one another—a bond that each day seemed to thicken anew, connecting one to the other, like the chains that joined them together when they ventured out in public.

Iason broke the gaze first, taking hold of him and stroking him masterfully, just the way his pet liked it. Excited, Riki rested his hands on the Blondie’s head, ready for the wet stimulation of his mouth. His master answered this by flicking his tongue along his head and its ridge, and up and down his shaft.

“Yeah,” Riki encouraged. “That’s nice.”

The Blondie continued this for a while as Riki stroked his hair, releasing long, sharp breaths that communicated his pleasure. When Iason finally took him into his mouth, the mongrel groaned, nearly spilling his seed from the stimulation. “Hold on,” he cautioned, prompting Iason to remain still while his pet attempted to regain control, biting his lip. Riki stared with lust at the beautiful Blondie who knelt before him, sitting back gracefully on his heels, his long hair trailing exotically on the floor around him.

“Okay,” Riki said, finally, moaning loudly as Iason resumed pleasuring him with his mouth. “Fuck it,” he muttered, deciding there was no way he could make things last in his aroused state, so there was no point in holding back.

He celebrated this decision by thrusting eagerly into his master's mouth, groaning from the delicious stimulation. "Holy shit," he breathed. "You feel so...oh fuck...yeah, right there, just like—ohhhhhh!" With sudden urgency, he climaxed violently into the waiting mouth of the handsome master who had punished him so relentlessly just hours before. The dark-haired, dark-eyed mongrel from the slums had no idea how he had come to this point in his life, so shamelessly seeking the affection and sexual attention of Iason Mink—the Blondie who had torn him from the only world he knew, whipping him into submission, demanding his obedience and love.

"What is it, pet?" Iason asked, softly, studying his anguished expression with concern.

Riki looked away, shaking his head.

Iason rose up on his knees, forcing his pet's attention. "Tell me."

The mongrel stared back at him for a moment. "I don't want to love you," he said, finally.

A little surprised by this remark, Iason considered it for a moment. "Does that mean you do love me?" he asked.

"No," Riki shot back, a little too quickly.

"And why, pet, is it so terrible a thing for you to love me?"

"Because you're...you're...a fucking asshole. You're always hurting me."

"If you mean I'm always punishing you, that's because you need correction," Iason said, softly.

"Like this morning? That was so unfair, Iason. Just because I cared about you. It was only natural that I'd want to do something. And you...really hurt me."

"You're forgetting once again," Iason sighed, "that you are my pet, Riki."

"How could I fucking forget that! You rub it in my face every damned day!"

"Calm down," the Blondie said, sternly. "Don't raise your voice with me."

“That’s exactly what I’m talking about! You’re always...putting me in my place.”

Iason laughed softly. “Perhaps, pet, if you stayed in your place, there would be less putting you there.” The mongrel attempted to look away, and Iason firmly held his chin, forcing his attention. “Look at me. Riki. You ARE my pet. As such, I am responsible for your behavior. If you need correction, make no mistake—I WILL punish you. With as much force as it takes. Surely you know that by now. Why you persist in defying me after all this time is simply beyond me.”

“I don’t want to be your pet,” Riki replied. “I want to be...your lover.”

Smiling at the mongrel’s bold declaration, Iason softened a little. “Is that so? You want to be my lover?” Amused, he laughed softly.

“What’s so fucking funny about that?” his pet demanded.

“Because pet, you want to be my lover, but you don’t want to love me. These seem like contradictory aspirations, in my view.”

His pet fell silent, feeling a little foolish. He slumped down in the chair, sulking.

“Come now. What’s brought on all this?”

Now Riki gazed at him steadily. “When did it happen? When were you with him?”

Iason rose to his feet, realizing now that Riki was upset about Katze. “So. Is that what this is about?” He smiled. “Don’t tell me my pet is jealous?”

“When did it happen?”

“I don’t have to give an accounting to you, pet.”

Riki pouted, annoyed.

“Might I remind you, Riki, that you were the first to open that door.”

Unable to dispute this fact, his pet remained silent. So. Now he knew it had happened after Riki had been with Katze. But why had Iason pursued Katze? Simply to hurt him? Or out of curiosity?

Revenge? And what about...Daryl? The mongrel pondered his master's actions, trying to uncover his motivations.

The Blondie sighed. "Go eat your dinner."

Riki obeyed, rising to leave the room. But as he brushed past Iason, the Blondie grabbed hold of him, pulling him close. Still angry, Riki stubbornly refused to embrace him, his arms hanging limply by his side.

"I wanted to know what you experienced," Iason whispered in his ear. "I had to understand why you wanted him."

Melting at his master's confession, Riki now threw his arms around him, burying his head in his chest. "Iason. Don't you get it? That was the night you were with Raoul. I was so...hurt."

For a long moment, the two of them stood together, holding each other, their embrace and shared secrets somehow soothing deep wounds, much like the accelerator had healed Riki's punished flesh.

* * *

Riki was on the balcony, smoking, thinking about the evening ahead. Katze and Daryl were both to be punished that night—severely punished. He still could not believe Iason was going to whip them both. For all his transgressions, Riki had never been whipped by his Blondie master—except by a kasey-whip, which hardly counted. And not only were they to be punished...apparently Daryl was being dismissed as Iason's Furniture. Riki was especially upset about this; he had come to truly enjoy Daryl's company. But at the same time Riki knew Iason was giving him an extraordinary gift—greater freedom, and, above all else, the chance to be with Katze.

Almost as though Daryl sensed he was the subject of Riki's thoughts, he wandered onto the balcony.

"So. Today's the big day," Riki said. "You scared?"

“Oh yes,” Daryl freely admitted. “But as you said...at least I’ll get to see Katze...though not in the circumstances either of us would like.”

The mongrel took a long drag, pondering whether he should bring up the matter that had been eating away at him. Deciding that Daryl had a right to know, he exhaled, looking directly at him. “There’s something...I want to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“I wonder if you knew...that Iason...and Katze—,” Riki stopped, uncertain of how to proceed.

“Yeah,” Daryl replied, softly. “I know. Katze told me.”

“What did he say?”

“He said...that Iason made him service him. We didn’t go into details. He...wanted to wait until we could be together to discuss it.”

Riki considered this, curious about this last detail.

Daryl shook his head. “I’m not sure exactly what happened. It was the same day Iason found out about the two of you—the day he paddled you. Katze said he tried to strangle him.”

“What!” Riki exclaimed. All this was news to him. “Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Because...I didn’t want to talk about it,” Daryl admitted.

“Oh.” Riki tossed his cigarette over the ledge.

“You should really put that out before you discard it like that,” Daryl chided. “What if it hits someone down there, still lit?”

Riki giggled, delighted with this thought, imagining Raoul walking under the balcony at precisely that moment.

Daryl shook his head. “You’re...incorrigible. I’m just wondering what you’ll do next to get into trouble. What will it be...dropping something else over the ledge, or maybe destroying Iason’s art collection?”

The mongrel blinked for a moment, suddenly given an extraordinarily naughty idea. His eyes widening, he grinned at Daryl and then proceeded to leave the balcony, darting through the penthouse.

Recognizing Riki's mischievous look with alarm, Daryl took off after him. Riki had already made his way to the hidden door that led to the observatory.

"No! Riki!" Daryl cried out, suddenly guessing at the mongrel's intent.

Grinning, Riki opened the door and scrambled up the steps. Daryl picked up his pace, hoping to catch him before he committed a very unwise transgression. "Don't do it! Don't even think about it! Riki! You'll regret it!"

But Riki, now having thought of a way to get back at Raoul for hurting Iason, had made his way into the observatory, dashing across the floor to the wall where the immense painting hung, depicting Ios and Erphanes in the exact likenesses of Iason and Raoul. Without hesitating, the mongrel flipped on his lighter, holding it up to Raoul's face, watching it distort and melt. Then, he moved the flame down to the Blondie's ridiculously immense—though admittedly accurate—organ, subjecting it to a similar fate. The net effect of Riki's artistic commentary was comical, yet given the fact that he had just vandalized a great work of art, horrifying.

Daryl reached the observatory and apprehended Riki's handiwork with disbelief. "Riki!" he scolded, furious. "Are you completely insane? Iason's going to kill you!"

"What are you so mad about? I'm just expressing myself artistically."

"That was actually...a beautiful painting, and you just ruined it," Daryl lamented. "You're really going to be in for it this time. He's probably going to whip you, along with Katze and me."

"No, he won't," Riki said, confidently. "He doesn't want to leave any scars. He's too much of a pervert to mess up my body."

"Stupid! He's going to beat you within an inch of your life! That painting was worth millions! Not to mention the fact that Raoul painted it!"

"I don't fucking care," the mongrel replied, defiantly, thrilled with his revenge on Raoul.

Exasperated, Daryl grabbed him by his wrist, dragging him downstairs.

“What the fuck are you doing?” Riki demanded, trying to escape his punishing grip, surprised at Daryl’s strength.

“Hush.”

Laughing at Daryl’s Master-like manner, Riki allowed him to successfully drag him to the great hall, then to the cabinet where his chains were kept.

“Oh come on! You’re not seriously going to chain me up!”

Daryl answered this by snapping on his collar, leading him by the chain over to the post in the corner of the hall. Riki giggled furiously, finding Daryl’s manner decidedly amusing.

When the grey-eyed youth fastened him to the post, however, he suddenly realized Daryl wasn’t playing a game.

“Hey! What the fuck! Let me go, dammit!”

“No. Master Iason is going to be furious with you. It’s my responsibility to make sure you don’t get into any more trouble. I’m doing this for your sake, too.”

“What! Daryl!”

Firm in his decision, Daryl returned to the kitchen, leaving Riki to howl his outrage. Once it became clear that he wasn’t going to budge on the issue, the mongrel sat down, smiling at Daryl’s resolve. He was still pleased with his decision to destroy Raoul’s painting, though in the back of his mind he knew he was in for some serious punishment when Iason discovered what he’d done.

When the Blondie finally came home, he froze upon apprehending Riki chained in the hall. Iason turned to Daryl, who had come to greet him.

“Why is Riki in chains?”

“Forgive me, Master Iason. Riki has done something that will displease you, and I felt he needed restraining to prevent further transgressions.”

“Is that so?” Hands on hips, Iason’s voice rose, betraying his anger. “And what did he do this time?”

“He...damaged the painting Raoul made for you.”

“He—,” Iason started, then fell silent, striding toward the observatory, shooting Riki a withering look as he passed him. “Daryl had better be horribly mistaken,” he warned.

Now feeling a little less exuberant over his accomplishment, Riki tried to remain calm as he waited for the inevitable.

Iason ascended the stairs quickly, his heart pounding as he entered the observatory. His first glance confirmed Daryl’s assertion; as he walked toward the painting, he shook his head in disbelief when he saw Raoul’s masterpiece so maliciously defaced. While he knew Riki had done it out of jealousy and anger, he felt as though something extraordinary had been lost forever, and for that, his pet was going to pay.

Returning downstairs, he went straightway to the special drawer where he kept his instruments of discipline, opening it with a slam of his fist, and retrieving the taming stick. He walked toward Riki, his eyes dark with anger.

“On your feet,” he ordered, sternly.

Determined to maintain his dignity, Riki obeyed, rising, meeting his master’s menacing gaze with defiance.

“Lower your pants.”

The mongrel unzipped his pants and then hesitated, eyeing the taming stick that his master had begun slapping against his gloved hand in a threatening manner.

Impatient with his pet’s procrastination, Iason grabbed hold of his trousers and tugged them down, roughly, flipping him over and shoving him up against the wall. He pinned his hands over his head, beginning to reprimand him.

“You’re in for it this time, Riki. I’ve had it. What you did is unconscionable. So prepare yourself for pain—and you deserve every single stroke.” Iason was so furious, his voice shook, as did his body.

Without further preparation, the Blondie swung the taming stick, striking Riki’s bare bottom—still sore from the previous day’s spanking—with merciless force, using the full range of his arm to generate velocity and increase the pain of impact. Despite all his

plans to remain cool and detached during the punishment, Riki screamed, now remembering all too well the agony of the taming stick. Iason's cloak swirled rhythmically as he struck his recalcitrant pet over and over, his hair swaying as he leaned over to deliver the punishing blows to Riki's most tender region.

Daryl watched Riki's punishment from the hall, standing with his feet apart and his arms crossed on his chest, feeling some sympathy for him, but at the same time believing Iason was completely justified in disciplining him. He was actually a little angry with Riki for what he'd done; Raoul's painting had been one of the most beautiful things he'd ever seen, and it reminded him of when Katze had taken him to the ocean where they loved each other in the tides under the twin moons Ios and Erphanes. The painting had meaning for him, and Riki had, in a moment of ridiculous mischief, ruined it forever. And when Raoul found out...Daryl shuddered, wondering what the Blondie would do when he learned how his masterpiece had been destroyed...and by whom.

To say that Riki had been thoroughly tamed was an understatement. Iason had caned him to the point where his pet's legs buckled and he was being held up completely by Iason, who continued to pin his wrists to the wall above his head. In truth, it was the worst taming Riki had endured at his master's hand, and not something he ever cared to repeat.

Iason was so angry with Riki, he couldn't stop striking him. Now he began to punctuate his punishment with a sharp tongue-lashing. "How does this feel? Perhaps now you regret your utter stupidity? Stupid, foolish pet! Shame on you! I'm furious with you, Riki. Oh, you think begging is going to save you? It's too late for that. Naughty pet! No, I'm not going to stop. You're not getting off that easy. I'm not finished until you fully regret what you've done."

Ignoring Riki's pathetic begging, his piercing screams, and anguished sobs, the Blondie continued to punish his pet until his fury had run its course, which was unfortunate for the mongrel, since Iason's fury was long-winded and unrelenting. When at last he stopped, Riki slid to the floor, sobbing so hard he choked on his

tears, coughing and gasping. His master stood over him, staring down at him with both hands on his hips, one hand still wielding the taming stick.

“I’ve been too easy on you, pet,” he admonished. “Now you know what real punishment feels like. And this is what you can expect in the future should you disobey me again. Or perhaps next time I’ll use the paddle. Would you like that?”

“No,” Riki whispered.

“What’s that?” Iason said, loudly. When Riki failed to reply, he grabbed his hair, pulling his head back. “Answer me!”

“No, Master Iason,” his pet answered, softly, feeling completely defeated and beaten into submission.

“You will address me as Master Iason from now on. Is that understood?”

Riki bit his lip to keep from yelling out his views on this.

“I said,” Iason said, annunciating each word, as he leaned in close to Riki’s face, “IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?”

“Yes, Master Iason,” the mongrel replied, averting his eyes.

“Every time you fail to do so, you’ll get three strikes with the taming stick. Is that perfectly clear?”

Riki sighed. “Yes, Master Iason.”

As if to demonstrate the validity of this threat, Iason retrieved the taming stick belt and put it on, sliding the stick into its sheath. It was something, he realized now, that he should have done long ago. He had allowed his pet to become too familiar, had given him too many liberties, and Riki had paid him back with a never-ending series of transgressions that no Blondie would tolerate as he had. With new Furniture coming into his household, he would have to rein in his unruly pet if he had any chance of training Juthian.

Now Iason turned and regarded Daryl, nodding at him and motioning to Riki with his head. “Well done,” the Blondie said, simply, before retreating to the library.

For Daryl, it was a moment that was twelve years in coming—praise from his master. That it should come on the very day he was to be severely punished by Iason, on the eve of his dismissal, struck

him as ironic. He could only assume the Blondie was referring to his having restrained Riki when he proffered his two-word approbation. Daryl shook his head, puzzling over the unpredictabilities of life.

* * *

"I'm going out...to the pavilion," Iason said, keeping his eyes averted as Daryl accompanied him to the door. "I'll be back very soon."

"Yes, Sir," Daryl said, softly. He knew why his master was going to the pavilion. He was going...to purchase a whip. One that would be used in a few hours on him...and on Katze.

Riki lay on the floor in the corner of the hall, miserable. He had managed to get his pants back up, but his bottom burned so badly he was tempted to pull them back down. Only his pride prevented him from doing so. Iason had brought Raoul's painting down and it leaned against the wall, just out of Riki's grasp, as a reminder to him of his transgression. Iason had wanted it there as a reminder to himself, as well, so that he would not forget what Riki had done.

But now that Iason was gone, Riki found the painting amusing, and giggled at the comical rendering of Raoul, feeling some relief to be distracted from his suffering.

"You'd better not let Iason catch you laughing like that," Daryl advised.

"I'm not that stupid," the mongrel retorted.

"Hmmmm."

"Prick!" Riki teased.

At that moment, the door buzzed, and Daryl went to answer it, surprised to see that it was Raoul.

"Master Iason is not here at the present," Daryl said, nervously, as he realized Raoul's painting was in plain view.

"I'll wait," Raoul said, moving as if to enter.

Daryl moved in front of him.

"How dare you block my way!" Raoul bellowed.

"I have...good reason."

Raoul hesitated. "Iason's orders?"

"No, but—."

"Move!" Raoul pushed him aside, angrily, striding into the penthouse.

On seeing Riki in chains, and then the painting next to him, he stopped, frozen, staring at his defaced image in disbelief. At that moment, all his good intentions to try and talk things out with Iason were swept away. In an instant, his previous plan to seek his revenge on the mongrel reasserted itself.

"You're dead," Raoul hissed, lunging toward the mongrel, who quickly leapt to his feet, but was essentially defenseless, not to mention restricted by his neckchain.

The Blondie unleashed a hard punch to Riki's face, then his stomach. The mongrel bent over, gasping for breath, and before he could recover, Raoul picked him up and threw him against the wall. Daryl instinctively ran and jumped on Raoul's back, and—not knowing how to fight—bit down as hard as he could on the Blondie's ear. Raoul howled in rage and pain, flinging Daryl from him, kicking him several times, and then picking him up and throwing him against a wall, knocking him unconscious.

Riki was able to use this distraction to get to his feet and now fought back with all his strength, managing to get in a few good punches of his own before Raoul overcame him with his brutal strength. The mongrel saw Daryl lying on the ground, blood coming from the boy's mouth, and he wished for Iason to come and save them. It was his last thought before he lost consciousness.

When he awoke, he was in an unfamiliar, dark place. Raoul stood over him, his face bruised and bloody, arms folded across his chest. "Good. You're awake. Now you're all mine, Riki. It's time to punish you."

TAMING RIKI

VOLUME 1 - PART 2

間の
楔



きら たけのうち

KIRA TAKENOUCHI

A Blondie's Tears

Riki stared up at Raoul in horror, instinctively trying to climb to his feet, but found, to his dismay, that he was restrained—his hands bound together and secured above his head, and his legs spread-eagled, manacled to some hidden restriction. He was completely naked, lying on a bed.

“Iason!” he cried, panicked, instinctively struggling against his restraints despite the obvious futility of his efforts.

Raoul laughed, his voice deep and menacing. “He can’t hear you. And where you are, no one cares if you scream.”

The mongrel gaped at his Blondie captor, who wore only a pair of membrane-thin silk trousers, his long hair flowing in waves over the impressive musculature of his upper body. Sculpted arms, crossed on his bare chest, bulged with the formidable strength the mongrel remembered all too well. His face was bloodstained, along with some of his hair, and his left cheek was bruised.

Riki’s mind sifted through the images from the penthouse. He had been chained, smarting from Iason’s taming, and then suddenly Raoul had appeared, and then....

Now his heart pounded as he remembered that Daryl had been knocked unconscious after being hurled against a wall. The cool sensation of metal against his throat told him he still wore his collar, but the neckchain was gone.

“Where’s Daryl? Where am I?” Riki looked around the unfamiliar room, searching for anything that might tell him where he was. The room was dark. There was a long, low table—and on it....

Riki shuddered.

On it were all manner of punishment devices, lined up neatly as if on display. Somewhere, not too far away, he heard screaming.

Raoul leaned forward, smiling. "You're in the Taming Tower."

Riki heard these words with despair, knowing all too well what went on at the Taming Tower, the privately owned suites run by the infamous Omaki Ghan. It was a palace of punishment—a dark, but posh hotel where Elites brought their pets and Furniture to be tamed into total submission. In the case of pets—who with the occasional deviant exception were typically docile from inbred controls—Elites brought them simply to unleash their own sadistic fetishes on them. It was no secret that many Blondies enjoyed disciplining their pets for no reason other than their own amusement, and Omaki Ghan catered to these Elites, offering every sort of device and assistive technology available to appeal to the dark tastes of Tanagurian Blondies. Pets slated for termination were often brought to the Tower and there typically whipped to death with a C-20 kasey. Omaki Ghan handled the relocation of unwanted pets—the placement of older pets into brothels and open clubs and the disposal of those deliberately or accidentally killed during punishment.

Iason had threatened often enough to cart him off to the Tower for some serious punishment, yet had never followed through with his threat, always resolving any issue of disobedience with a thorough discipline session at home.

"He's...going to kill you," Riki warned, wondering desperately where Iason was.

The Blondie laughed again. "He'll never find you here. You're in for an eternity of pain and torture, mongrel. And anything else I want before I decide to kill you." He leaned close to his face, his voice lowering to a harsh whisper. "I'm going to fuck you until you bleed."

Riki said nothing, betrayed no emotions in his expression. But while he struggled to control his rising fear, he felt, more than anything, puzzled. Why did Raoul believe Iason would not find him? Could it be...he didn't know about the pet ring tracer?

Smirking, Raoul reached down and touched the pet ring, but the Blondie's unauthorized signature had no activation power, and Riki showed no independent sign of arousal—not in this situation.

“Let me guess. You're expecting your ring to save you. Any minute, Iason will come bursting in here to rescue you, isn't that it?” He laughed, a barbaric sound that sent chills through the mongrel.

Riki made no reply, staring icily at him.

Now the Blondie held up a small device—a spherical gadget with metal rings that gyrated noiselessly around its core.

“This is an Interceptor. An import from Xeron—unauthorized, of course. It blocks tracer signals within a two-hecatron radius. So. Iason will never be able to find you.”

Raoul had made the acquisition the previous day when he had initially plotted to abduct and kill Riki, although at the eleventh hour he had abandoned his fell design; as he considered his pairing partner's history of vacillations and mixed signals throughout the tumultuous course of their relationship, he had decided to approach Iason one more time.

The debasement of his painting had changed everything; Raoul knew that Riki had done it, and at that moment he lost all perspective, his rage propelling him to resume his dark ambition.

The Blondie glared down at him. “Which means for the rest of your short, worthless life, you'll be begging me pathetically for mercy—not that I intend to give it.”

Despairing from this news, Riki trembled, but made a decision. He would incite Raoul into killing him rather than endure his agenda of torture.

“Fuck you,” he spat.

Raoul repaid his defiance with a hard backhand to his face, delivered with a bare hand after the Blondie had whipped off his glove.

“Keep your filthy mouth shut,” he snarled. “You'll speak only when I tell you to.”

“I’ll speak whenever the fuck I want, you perverted shit-eating Blondie bastard!”

Another hard strike across his face. Now Riki tasted blood in his mouth, but this didn’t silence him. It was better to go quickly. He laughed, defiantly. “Even if you kill me, it’s not going to change the fact that Iason didn’t want you. How does that make you feel, knowing he prefers his mongrel pet to you?”

Surprisingly, Raoul laughed at this. “If you’re trying to provoke me into killing you right away so you can forgo the pain that’s in store for you, I’ll tell you now—your mongrel arts don’t work on me. I have no intention of rushing the agenda, so you might as well accept that your last moments of life are going to be pure hell.”

“He’ll kill you,” Riki said, darkly, his black eyes glimmering. “He’ll tear you to pieces, when he finds out what you did to me. He’d kill you just for touching me and bringing me here—and for everything else you do from here on, he’ll make you suffer in ways you can’t imagine.”

“Silence!” Raoul struck him again, hard, giving him a bloody lip. He knew Riki was right—Iason would not tolerate what he had done. He’d thrown everything away—his reputation, his career, and most likely his life—by taking Iason’s pet. He would be forced to flee Amoi, or else betray Iason to Jupiter to escape the Blondie’s vengeance.

But...he wasn’t going to dwell on any of that now. He’d already abducted Riki...he couldn’t change that. So, given what it would cost him, Raoul was determined to enjoy the hours...or perhaps even days...ahead.

He uncuffed one of Riki’s ankles, fingers biting into his skin like a vice when the mongrel tried to use the opportunity to kick him. Restraining him easily with his formidable grip, Raoul released the other ankle, then, smiling slightly as he looked into Riki’s eyes, flipped him over firmly onto his stomach. With deliberate roughness, he cuffed Riki’s ankles again, enjoying the view of Iason’s pet bound, prostrate, and spread-eagled, and especially the dark bruises on the mongrel’s bottom.

“This must be Iason’s handiwork,” he said, brushing his fingers gently along the mongrel’s punished bottom before suddenly striking him as hard as he could, eliciting a deliciously anguished scream from his captive.

“Ohh,” Raoul laughed brokenly. “I’m really going to enjoy this.”

He walked over to the table to select his first instrument of pain. Privately he wondered how Iason could claim to love the mongrel and then leave such angry bruises on him, although he had no doubt that Riki deserved it. For the first time it occurred to him that, given the fact that Riki was chained next to the defaced painting and that he had obviously very recently endured a brutal taming, Iason had punished him because of the painting. A faint, more rational voice from deep within urged him to contact Iason and offer to return Riki to him now, before he laid another hand on him.

Then, Iason’s confession of his love for Riki pressed into his mind, the pain tormenting him anew and reaffirming the necessity of what he had in mind for Iason’s pet.

Picking up a long, thick paddle, he turned and held it up to Riki, who watched his selection with trepidation. “Remember this? An excellent choice, wouldn’t you say? I seem to remember you especially enjoyed being paddled.”

Now Raoul walked slowly toward the mongrel, paddle in hand, the fearsome look on his face terrifying to Iason’s manacled and bound pet.

Iason was not going to save him. Without the tracer’s signature, there was no way for his master to find him. While his rational mind spoke these facts to him coldly, his heart told him something altogether different—that somehow, Iason would find him. He would find a way. Closing his eyes, he tried to link minds with Iason, sending him an image of where he was. He knew he didn’t need to plead for his master to help him; if Iason knew where he was, he would come.

Despite his fear, he was determined not to give Raoul the satisfaction of his tears, and so he steeled himself for what he knew would be nearly unbearable pain.

His prediction was not in error. With savage force, Raoul brought down the paddle on Riki's newly tamed bottom, giving the mongrel his first real taste of hardcore punishment. He screamed—or someone near him did, he was too disoriented from the pain to make the distinction.

"Yes," Raoul whispered, delighted with the mongrel's reaction and agonized scream. He paused for a moment, resting the paddle gently against his buttocks tantalizingly, his hands starting to tremble.

Then, with lightning speed, he whipped his arm back and brought the paddle down with another excruciating blow announced by a loud whack, followed by more screaming.

"Iason!" Riki called out instinctively, desperate for his master to save him from Raoul, his Bison pride completely evaporated.

"Iason is not going to help you." The words were uttered coldly, darkly, as Raoul once again rested the paddle on the mongrel's flesh in preparation for the next strike.

"Why...are you doing this?"

"I told you...to keep your mouth SHUT!" Whack!

Riki screamed, this time his cries ending in anguished sobs, despite all his intentions not to let Raoul see him cry. The pain was beyond comprehension. "Please, Raoul," he whispered.

Whack! "Did you not hear me? You'll stay silent unless spoken to! And you're to address me as Master Raoul."

You're NOT my master, Riki thought, angrily, his thoughts then turning to Iason. He would never see the Blondie again, he realized now. And he had never really told him the secret he kept in his heart...that he loved him—and that, despite his continuous rebellions against his authority, Riki had come to feel comfortable, even proud, of his status as Iason's special pet. He had continually defied Iason out of anger at himself; he was ashamed that he had come to love his Blondie master, who he knew could never return his feelings in the same way; he wanted to be punished for his stupidity and weakness, and he craved, in some deeply twisted way, the attention and intimacy that came with brutal punishment—the

intensity of the bond between them as master and pet when Iason asserted his authority and demanded complete submission. He wondered what his master's reaction really would be when he discovered what had happened to him, after he had unleashed his vengeance on Raoul for abducting and violating his property. Would he really care that he had died? How soon would he acquire another pet?

Punishing Riki was immensely arousing to the fearsome Blondie. As he rested the paddle threateningly on Riki's bottom between strikes, he fondled himself, his engorged cock easily accessible in his loose, silken trousers. When Riki began begging him, his need for coitus became too urgent to ignore. There was plenty of time for more punishment. He set the paddle down on the bed, lowering his trousers to his thighs, then climbed onto the bed and on top of the mongrel, penetrating him without preparation or comment.

Plunging into the mongrel's tight depths savagely, he relished Riki's cries as he tore through unwilling flesh, the blood from his pillage soon providing lubrication to enhance his pleasure. It was a brutally delightful fuck, and Raoul loved every minute of it. Beneath him, Riki endured the rape through gritted teeth, glad for a reprieve from the paddling, but not enjoying his depredation in the least, wishing with every fiber of his being for Raoul's death. It was hard to believe that he had actually enjoyed it the last time the Blondie had taken him.

"I'm going to fuck you all night. Until you're raw. Then I'll rough you up inside a bit and fuck you some more. After I punish you first. I'll fuck you until I'm tired of you and then I'll castrate you before you die." Raoul whispered his dark promises into the mongrel's ear, his deep voice strangely sensual from his arousal, creating a disturbing incongruency between his erotic delivery and the eerie content of his speech.

Horried, Riki closed his eyes, trying desperately to remove himself from the hell he had awoken to as he prepared himself for torture and death. His thoughts drifted to the friends and lovers he

had known during the course of his lifetime, and of those he had loved most, one man dominated them all—his beautiful master, Iason Mink.

* * *

Deciding on the right whip took Iason longer than he had anticipated. The selection of suitable implements at the pavilion was mind-boggling; Yousi had an entire wall devoted to whippage. Though Iason had never been particularly fond of whips, he had always had a special weakness for fine craftsmanship, and began admiring the imported Icarian bone handles among some of the more luxurious models, most notably the engraved and bejeweled Emperor series. The MXV Emperor, in particular, was intricately engraved with an ancient gripping-beast motif, which Iason recognized as belonging to the barbarian culture of Urasia—an intriguing replica, especially considering the fact that it had been imported from Xeron. The tiny eyes of the beasts were inset with gems—rubies, sapphires, gamians, and an intriguing, multi-colored gem Iason did not recognize.

The handle's ornamentation reminded him of Riki—it was exactly the sort of thing his pet would have been drawn to—except in this case, he might have been less enthusiastic, given its functional use. Just thinking of Riki sent darker thoughts edging into his consciousness; the image of his pet lying curled up on the floor, tear-stained face distorted with pain, filled him with sadness. His anger had now dissipated considerably, though he was still pained over the loss of a great work of art. Iason had been severe on Riki this time, and while there was no question that his pet deserved it, he found the mongrel's pathetic suffering a little hard to bear.

Just knowing that he would have to be firm with his pet, now that a new Furniture was coming into his household, was distasteful to him. He wasn't looking forward to taming Riki all over again—this time properly, as he should have from the start. Punishment

and discipline were one thing—but having to break the mongrel’s spirit, force him finally into complete submission, was something else altogether. Yet, something had to be done to rein in Riki’s disobedience. His own reputation was at stake. He shuddered to think how Raoul would react when he discovered what had happened to his painting. Iason could perhaps keep it from him for a time—but not forever.

Though less disheartened about the necessity of punishing Katze and Daryl, Iason had no real desire to carry out the evening’s agenda. While he might admittedly enjoy disciplining Katze—some—he doubted he would get much satisfaction punishing either of them as severely as he knew he must. It was simply what must be done...what any other Blondie would do. Both men had earned the whipping in store from them. But Iason was not administering the punishment out of revenge, or even—at this point—anger. He was simply fulfilling his responsibilities as an Elite, doing exactly what Jupiter would insist he do.

All the same, he wished the evening would not come. Had such punishment been his to administer years before, he would not have given it a moment’s thought. He would not have dreaded the suffering of the eunuch lovers or felt pity for them—and the fact that he did so now disturbed him.

But, regardless of the cognitive dissonance that plagued him, Daryl and Katze were to be punished; Iason needed to finalize his decision regarding the whip. The MXV Emperor was truly a work of art, and only after admiring the handle for a considerable amount of time did he consider the punishing lash itself, noting that it was a full-sized, quarter-inch whip with emission technology. He searched the handle for the options with some confusion, not finding a display.

“Lord Iason, may I help you with that?” an attendant asked, gently, having watched the Blondie quietly for some time.

“Where’s the panel?”

The attendant took the whip and pointed to the largest gripping-beast, then pressed down on its tongue. Immediately the entire face lifted and slid to the side, revealing the command panel.

“What does it do?”

“It has six emission options—sting, G-wave, stimulant, buffer, accelerator, and opiate release,” the attendant explained. “Sting, of course, releases an irritant into the flesh. G-wave elicits sexual arousal. Stimulant...releases a potent norepinephrine to revive the unconscious. Buffer provides the usual protective retracting mechanism to reduce scarring—quite an innovation for the whip, although some scarring is still probable. Accelerator...applies an opiate-free accelerator with each lash to promote healing—also quite painful, incidentally. And...opiate release provides variable options for administering pain relief.”

“What is the point of an opiate release during a whipping?” Iason demanded, amused.

“I believe, Lord Iason, that the Icarian government requires this option on all emission series whips because of pressure from the Pet Rights activists, who control the Senate.”

The Blondie laughed softly. “What idiocy. Nothing is gained by including an option that no one will use. Politics are the same everywhere, it seems.”

The attendant appropriately made no reply to this, waiting to see if he had any further questions. Iason decided he wanted to try the whip out, and strode over to the target pole. Opting to test it without emissions, he closed the command panel and then stood for a moment, just getting used to the feel of the thick handle in his hands, adjusting his grip with a few small tosses.

Taking a step back, he brought his arm back and then, lightning fast, unleashed a strike, almost casually, to the target pole, eliciting a loud crack. Brow furrowed, he moved back and struck again, this time putting his back into it, twisting his body to add some force, and was rewarded with an even more impressive-sounding crack. He struck the pole a few more times, then stopped.

Unlike previous visits to Yousi's shop, the Blondie was not getting his usual thrill.

"Have you found something suitable, Lord Iason?"

"This will do."

The attendant bowed. "Sir Yousi hopes you will accept it as a token of his admiration and respect."

Iason's lips curled into a slight smile. "And are you sure Yousi realizes this is a 400,000 credit whip?"

"He has said whatever you choose is yours—no charge. And anything else you might like."

The Blondie laughed softly, amused with mileage he was getting on Yousi's fear of him and guilt over the C-20 incident.

"We have a very nice selection of belts with multiple sheaths—I see you carry a taming stick," the attendant continued.

"Not necessary." Iason knew he would not be carrying the whip with him in public. Even if he needed to, he would simply attach it to his belt by the detachable loop hanging from its base. It was time he returned home—he was deliberately procrastinating the inevitable, and Katze would be arriving soon.

"Give my regards to Yousi," Iason said, and with a slight nod, exited the shop.

Returned to the top-floor of the complex, he turned the whip around in his hands, admiring the ornamented handle. He unsnapped the carrying loop and secured the whip to his belt. The whip hung down against his long leg, the tip brushing against the floor.

As he approached his door, he suddenly was overcome with an eerie sensation. The door hummed open automatically at his approach, configured to the emission signature that was programmed into his wrist terminal. Stepping into the penthouse, he stopped cold.

Daryl was lying on the floor, blood pooling around his face. His eyes immediately darted to the corner of the great hall—the place he had last seen Riki.

His pet was gone.

“Riki!” he bellowed, rushing toward the post, examining its broken clasp with horror. No one but a Blondie—an extremely strong one at that—could have ripped a neck chain from the post. Iason didn’t know anyone who could do it—except perhaps one person.

The painting was facedown on the floor and Riki’s urinal had been knocked over, its liquid contents swirling with blood that was splattered everywhere.

Panicked, Iason rushed back to Daryl, falling to his knees to examine him, then shaking him desperately.

“Daryl! Daryl!” Almost angrily, he forced the wounded Furniture into consciousness. The boy moaned. His eyes flicked open, grey and uncomprehending.

“Where’s Riki?” Iason demanded.

Slowly regaining some sense of where he was and what had happened, Daryl parted his blood- stained lips and mouthed a single word: Raoul.

The Blondie’s eyes grew wide with horror and rage. Leaping to his feet, he dashed to the command center, pulling up Riki’s tracer coordinates. His heart beating like a war drum, he stared at the message in horror.

Error 29/b/16789004— Z107M. Receiver Not Found.

Iason blinked in disbelief. Not found? How...how was that possible?

“Riki,” he whispered, resting his face in his hands. His beloved, most precious pet was in the hands of an Elite who Iason knew bore him no good will. Riki was in absolute peril. And there was nothing he could do to help him.

Why had Riki’s tracer pattern disappeared? How had Raoul managed to evade the tracing system?

A buzz at the door snapped him to action. He rushed toward it, his presence activating the automatic response sequence as the door hummed open.

Katze.

The handsome eunuch had never seen Iason Mink in such a state before. His face, though always fair, was deathly pale—an expression of unmistakable fear etched in his features—his eyes wildly intense, his lips parted and his breathing labored.

“Iason! What is it?”

“Riki’s gone. Raoul’s taken him.”

Katze’s brow furrowed as he tried to digest this terse but alarming bit of information.

“Taken...him? You mean you don’t know where he is? But the tracer—”

Iason shook his head. “He’s off the grid. His signature has disappeared.”

As the severity of the situation began to sink in, Katze was seized with a horrible thought.

“And...Daryl?”

Iason, who was lost in thought, now seemed to remember the fallen youth, turning to look toward him.

“Daryl!” Katze cried, dashing to his lover’s side. He knelt down, panic-stricken, overcome with emotion upon seeing him lying motionless in a pool of blood. “Oh god. Oh my god. Daryl!” He desperately tried to rouse him, out of his mind with fear. “Open your eyes, love. Please, sweetheart.” Katze looked up at Iason. “Did you call a medical team?”

“No.”

“What? Dammit, Iason! You just left him like this? Fucking get him some help!”

The Blondie did not respond, but simply stood, staring at a trail of blood he had just noticed on the floor, drops splattered from the door to the corner of the great hall where Riki had been chained to his post.

“Fuck!” Katze fumbled in his jacket pocket for his phone, flipping it open with trembling fingers. “Tanagura Medical. Emergency,” he ordered, then, upon reaching a connection, had a team immediately dispatched to Iason’s apartment.

Staring down at Daryl's motionless body, Katze was overcome with emotion—fear, grief, overwhelming love. This was the first time he'd seen him in the flesh in weeks, and to see him thus turned his heart inside out. Cradling his lover's head in his lap, he began rocking, tears flooding down his face, as he prayed to Astrajia, begging for help.

Iason, who did not believe in gods or other entities capable of intervention in the realm of men or the laws of the quantum universe—other than Jupiter—had no one to appeal to for his own peace of mind. He did not even know how to pray. He suffered without comfort in an inner realm of dark torment, his mind beset with a thousand images of what was happening to Riki.

Horrible things.

And there was nothing he could do. Nothing.

His mind raced as he calculated how far Raoul could have gotten—even if Raoul had abducted Riki immediately after Iason had left for the pavilion, he could not have gotten far. But...which direction? How had he managed to block the tracing signal? Iason wasn't even aware such a thing was possible. But then...Raoul always seemed to be a step ahead when it came to technology.

Sitting down heavily in his favorite chair, the chair where countless times Riki had crawled onto his lap, Iason stared vacantly before him at Riki's punishment corner, at the blood splattered on the floor, suddenly realizing how defenseless his pet would have been against Raoul, chained to the post and sore from his thrashing. Daryl obviously could provide no significant protection—unless, of course, he had been armed. But Iason never imagined his pet would be in danger in his own home or that an assault would come from a Blondie.

He had underestimated Raoul—the intensity of his passion, the extremes he would go to, and how cruel he could truly be.

"Riki," he whispered, suddenly overcome with emotion, longing to have his pet safe in his arms. With trembling fingers, he brushed a hot wetness from his eyes, the impossible, indescribably sad tears of a Blondie.

His head ached—pounding—the pain excruciatingly intense. He had to do...something. He had appeal to Jupiter for assistance, even if there was nothing Jupiter could do. In doing so, he would probably lose Riki...but if it could ensure his safety, he was willing to risk Jupiter's terms and the inevitable reprimand.

The pain his head was suddenly overwhelming. Iason brought his hands to his temples, moaning. Suddenly, a bright, pristine light blinded him for a moment, and then, as it faded, Iason saw Riki. Tied to a bed. Raoul stood over him, laughing. The image shifted, becoming less distinct. Then, he saw a tall building, the letters of its flashing neon marquee slowly coming into focus—Taming Tower.

In the next instant the vision was gone, and the Blondie became aware of Katze's voice as tried to rouse Daryl.

"Come on, love," Katze whispered. "Wake up now, darling. I'm here."

Iason was on his feet, now in a frenzy. He ran to his desk to retrieve his laser, stopping cold when he saw that the entire drawer had been emptied out.

"Where's my laser?" he demanded. "Katze! Are you armed?"

"No."

"Why aren't you?"

Katze shrugged. "I didn't feel like dealing with your building's security check. Didn't figure there was a need for it in Eos."

Iason clenched his teeth, frustrated, then headed for the door. "I'm going."

"Where?"

"Midas. He's there. At the Taming Tower."

"How could you...possibly know that?"

"I saw it."

Perplexed, Katze said nothing, feeling pity for Iason, who he believed was so grief-stricken that he was no longer in his right mind. In that moment he was almost able to forgive the Blondie for failing to tend to Daryl—it was clear to him now that Iason was entirely preoccupied with his pet's well-being, his love for him so

great that everything else was simply of no importance to him. Katze felt the same way...about Daryl.

"I'm staying with Daryl," he asserted, in case there was any question about it.

Iason barely acknowledged him, his gaze resting briefly on his face before he left the penthouse.

The Blondie had never driven so fast in his life. He swerved in and out of traffic, narrowly averting several accidents, finally switching to hover-mode and pulling up into restricted airspace to increase his speed without endangering others. Tanagura Police immediately transmitted a request for confirmation of his identity. Iason entered his passcode.

The Chief of Police flickered onto the monitor screen. "Iason Mink. May we assist you?"

"No."

"Your speed exceeds protocol." It was stated simply, as though an everyday occurrence, when in fact no one, in years, had violated hovercraft airspace laws. But...this was Iason Mink.

"Override Alpha-Seven-Seven-Delta-Nine."

"Yes Sir. We'll relay your override to Midas Police." The screen went blank...but only for a moment.

Now Jupiter appeared.

"Why are you in restricted airspace?" she asked.

"Just for a little amusement," Iason smiled, adopting a relaxed, demure demeanor with surprising ease. Deception was one of his many gifts, and when it came to Jupiter, the Blondie had always been able to play her easily.

"You gave your code to override speed protocol."

Iason laughed. "Does that displease you? I wanted to see what she could do. I can go back to ground standard if you prefer." His heart was beating fast. What would he do if Jupiter ordered him to stop, summoning him?

"You're heading into Midas. Do you have business there?"

"Just pleasure. Doctor Yutaku thought a little recreation would help these headaches I've been having."

Satisfied, Jupiter now switched gears. “I have something for you—you can pick it up at the Dark Horse.”

“I’m flattered,” Iason said, his voice low and seductive.

“Be careful.”

Now the screen went blank, and Iason shivered, wiping the sweat from his brow. Did Jupiter’s warning refer to his speed, or something else? Any other time, he would have brooded over Jupiter’s words for hours. But not now.

He had crossed into Midas. It didn’t take long to find the Taming Tower—it was almost the tallest building in the pleasure city, situated near the center of town in the E-Zone district. Now that he was close to confronting Raoul and finding Riki—at least he hoped he was—Iason began to be consumed by the rage that grew within him, demanding release.

His anger with Raoul went beyond anything he had ever felt before. Raoul had taken his beloved pet—which by itself was a crime—and Iason had no doubt he was tormenting Riki in horrific ways. He was ready to kill Raoul and he would do so, if necessary. But first he would make him suffer. Even if he didn’t kill him, he would make him wish he was already dead.

* * *

Riki was aware that Raoul had left for a moment. He heard the sound of water, and then a slight curse uttered by the Blondie. Smiling, the mongrel guessed that Raoul was cleaning the wounds he and Daryl had inflicted on him. At least they had managed to gift him with some resistance and perhaps a little pain. The image of Daryl biting on the Blondie’s ear suddenly amused him, providing him a little relief from the horror of his situation.

His smile soon faded as Raoul came back into view, his face and mane now clean, the hair around his temples damp. “Shall we continue?” he asked, with an ominous smile.

The Blondie wandered unhurriedly over to the table of terror, pondering his instrument choice with disconcerting casualness.

“This might be amusing,” he said, examining a whip with an air of affected boredom. “Though...I suppose it doesn’t much matter which one I choose next, since you’ll eventually feel them all.”

“You’re a fucking asshole,” came the mongrel’s defiant retort.

“I told you,” Raoul hissed, “not to speak, and to address me as Master Raoul!”

“How can I address you as Master Raoul if I’m not supposed to speak, you fucking retard?”

At these words, Raoul strode forward and unleashed his fury onto his captive’s backside with a full- sized three-quarter inch whip, immediately drawing blood. Riki screamed in anguish, having never experienced the searing pain of a full-sized whip, and finding it most unpleasant.

“Who’s the idiot now? What kind of imbecile provokes the hand that’s about to whip him?”

Unable to articulate a response that actually included words, Riki simply wailed his frustration and agony as the Blondie burned new tracks of pain into his already severely punished flesh, adding to his misery a savage whipping that extended from his back down to his thighs.

The pain was so intense, so unbelievably overwhelming, that Riki began to drift in and out of consciousness. He eventually became aware that the whipping had ceased; he felt light-headed and cold and wondered if he would bleed to death. He would embrace death now if it came— anything to remove him from the horror of his current reality.

He became aware suddenly of an excruciating, burning pain on his backside, and he screamed incessantly as the Blondie applied an entire can of accelerator to his open wounds.

“Stings a little, doesn’t it?” Raoul smiled, enjoying Riki’s misery. “But I can’t have you bleeding to death now, when we have so much still ahead of us.”

“I hope he...fucking tortures you to death,” he whispered through parched lips, his voice hoarse from screaming.

Raoul grabbed his hair, pulling his head back violently. “Well, we both know that’s how you’re going to die, don’t we?”

Encouraged by the fact that the Blondie seemed to have abandoned his Address-Me-As-Master- Raoul mandate, Riki grew bolder, laughing defiantly.

“We’ll see how much you’re laughing after I’m done with you.” Raoul released him, and went to retrieve a new implement from the table. This time it was a branding wand. Flipping the unit on, the Blondie smiled at the mongrel’s expression as the tip of the wand grew red-hot.

“I suppose you’re wondering what I’m planning to do with this. Allow me to enlighten you. I’m going to brand you with my initials. After that,” he laughed softly, “let’s just say...it’s a surprise.”

* * *

Setting down on the rooftop of the Taming Tower, Iason wasted no time getting out and rushing to the elevator that would take him to Omaki Ghan’s private office. He got in, punching in overrides for all other user requests, and increasing transport speed to maximum. As soon as he arrived on Omaki’s level, he dashed into his office, relieved to see him there.

“I have an emergency situation. I need to know which room Raoul Am is in.”

“Iason Mink,” Omaki greeted, with a slight bow. “What an honor.”

“Now, Omaki!”

The Blondie raised an eyebrow at Iason’s emotional state, answering without even checking his terminal. “Floor 89, room Z542.”

“I need access. Disable the locks.”

“I can’t do that, Iason,” Omaki said softly. “Suppose you were to commit...a crime of some sort. If it could be shown I assisted you, I’d lose everything. You know my record.”

Iason grabbed hold of his shirt, pushing him close to the terminal screen. “Disable them now, or I’ll kill you.”

“That’s it,” the Blondie said, smiling, as he typed in the wanted deactivation codes. “I can’t be held accountable if you FORCE me to disable them. Also, would you mind locking me in that closet, so it’s clear I couldn’t alert the police?”

Ignoring this, as well as the amused look on Omaki’s face, Iason left, making for Raoul’s room.

* * *

R.A. The initials were now burned into the mongrel’s flesh, on his lower back just above his left cheek. Riki had never been burned before. He was learning that pain came in many different forms, each one different from the others but just as excruciating in its own unique way. Being branded as Raoul’s also carried the sting of humiliation—he would die with the Blondie’s initials stamped onto his flesh.

Riki had now despaired of Iason’s saving him, despite his earlier optimism that his master would somehow find him.

Raoul still held the hot branding wand in his hand, and when the Blondie spread his cheeks apart with his fingers and Riki realized what he had in mind, he broke down and pleaded. “Please, Raoul...have mercy.”

“Call me Master Raoul,” the Blondie said in a low voice, “and I’ll think about it.”

Trying to choke down his pride, Riki opened his mouth to offer the wanted appellation. But he couldn’t.

“Say it!”

Riki could feel the heat of the wand near his portal. But even if he called Raoul his master, would the Blondie stop what he had in mind? Riki didn’t think so.

“You had your chance. Now you’ll pay for your obstinacy.”

At that moment, the door to the suite hummed open, and there stood Iason Mink.

The Blondie had never looked more formidable, his wrath etched unmistakably onto his features. He stood, whip in hand, his eyes dark with rage and his breathing labored as he took in the scene before him, fuming. He glowered at Raoul, who was touching his pet in his most private regions— places forbidden to anyone but Iason Mink—brandishing a hot iron frighteningly close to a place of critical importance to both master and pet. His gaze shifted to his pet, who stared back at him with indescribable relief, restrained so helplessly on a blood-spattered bed.

“Iason!” Riki could hardly believe his eyes.

Raoul spun around to find, incredibly, that it was true. He stared at Iason incredulously, unable to conceive how he had possibly found him.

“Step away from him and drop that wand,” Iason said, coldly.

“You drove me to this,” Raoul retorted. “In your heart you know this.”

“How dare you touch him, Raoul! How dare you!”

“How dare you reject me for this filthy mongrel!”

“I told you to drop that wand.” Iason walked toward the Blondie, flipping his wrist to crack the whip menacingly.

Instead, Raoul lunged for him, hoping to overcome him by brute strength. Furious, Iason unleashed the whip on Raoul, knocking the wand from his hand and leaving bloody trails across his chest and arms as the Blondie instinctively raised his hands to shield off Iason’s savage whipping. The loud crack of the Blondie’s whip preceded Raoul’s surprised and anguished cries, a symphony of punishment that made the weak, tortured mongrel laugh softly, able to delight in his tormenter’s suffering despite his own agonizing pain.

Iason had set the whip emission option to Sting, which delivered a painful dose of burning irritant with every lash.

Suddenly, in a move that surprised Iason, Raoul grabbed hold of the whip as it lashed toward him, and with a mighty yank, pulled the whip from Iason’s hand, sending it spinning erratically through the air behind him. Hand dripping with blood, Raoul rushed toward

Iason, who thwarted his attack with a formidable punch to his face, then pulled out his taming stick to continue gifting Raoul with furious, unremitting blows.

Howling like a child, Raoul backed away, trying to escape the fury of the enraged Blondie.

“I’m going to beat you death,” Iason hissed.

“No!” Riki protested, hoarsely. “Torture him first!”

Smiling, Iason decided to honor his pet’s request—after he beat the Blondie unconscious first. “What’s your view on this, Raoul?” he asked, continuing to pummel the Blondie with an implement intended solely for unruly pets.

Unable to answer, Raoul cowered under the punishing arm of his old pairing partner, who seemed to be surrounded with a glowing aura that enhanced the fearsome beauty of his rage. He had never seen Iason look so frightening, his eyes glimmering darkly, his mouth set in a hard, uncompromising line, his arm whipping back with unrelenting retribution.

Iason did not stop until Raoul fell to his knees, at which time he grabbed him by his hair and spit unto his face, mongrel-style, much to Riki’s utter joy.

“Fuck yeah!” Riki rasped, laughing weakly.

“I’m not finished with you,” Iason warned, his voice shaking with fury, his face close to the broken Blondie who knelt before him. “Unfortunately for you, I’m not going to kill you now. When you wake up, you’re going to find out what pain really is. Make no mistake, Raoul: you’re going to fully regret each and every action you did to my Riki.”

Iason then began pounding him mercilessly with his fists, blood splattering on them both, until finally Raoul slumped to the ground, losing consciousness. He kicked him a few more times out of pure rage.

Turning, Iason rushed to his pet’s aid, gasping as he took in the extent of Riki’s injuries, his entire backside covered with bruises and lashmarks, his bottom black and bleeding, his portal purple

and violated. There was blood everywhere. And burned into the mongrel's skin were the initials R.A.

"Riki," he breathed, his voice thick with emotion, as he gently freed him of his restraints. Picking him up effortlessly, Iason pulled him close. Eyes closed, he relished holding his beloved pet in his arms again.

"I knew you'd come," Riki whispered.

"Pet. If I hadn't gotten here in time," now Iason fell silent, his voice choked by a constricting of his throat.

"But you did. I knew you would."

"Look what he's done to you. And I can only imagine—."

"It's over now," Riki interrupted.

"Oh Riki. I nearly went out of my mind. You are so precious to me. I...love you so much."

"I love you, too, Iason." Riki confessed his heart freely, wanting his master to know. He felt weak, sick—and was in so much pain—but Iason had come to save him, and for that the Blondie deserved the truth.

Hearing these words for the first time, spoken so sweetly from the pet who lay so limply in his arms, eyes starting to roll back, Iason once again experienced the inexplicable sting that presaged a wetness in his eyes.

A Blondie's tears.

Breaking Raoul

Someone was groaning—loudly. Eyes fluttering open, the Blondie stared in confusion at his own arm, his skin covered with bleeding lashmarks. He became aware that he was lying facedown and that his chest and arms burned from the contact with the surface beneath him. His entire body ached and throbbed. And that awful groaning....

With horror, Raoul realized the one who was groaning...was him. He discovered that he was restrained—his arms above his head, and his legs spread-eagled. From the feathery light sensation of air on his bare flesh, the Blondie knew he was naked. Someone had moved into his line of vision, but stood so close to him that he could only make out the bottom half of his body. Even so, he immediately recognized from his graceful movements and ivory-blond, silky hair that it was Iason.

“Finally coming around? What a fuss. You’ve been whimpering like a child for nearly an hour.” Not true exactly—his awakening had been punctuated with the erratic miserable groan—but Iason knew such an assertion would wound Raoul’s Blondie pride.

“Iason,” Raoul whispered. “Forgive me.”

“Why should I forgive you? If I had not found you when I did, you would have castrated my Riki and tortured him to death, from what he tells me.”

Raoul did not try to deny this assertion, although in his heart he had never been sure he would actually carry out the threats he had made to Iason’s pet. He had been leaning toward torturing him for awhile—certainly ravishing him thoroughly—and then offering

to return him to Iason on the condition of immunity from retribution. But he doubted Iason would believe this now.

“I was...consumed with jealousy...when you said you loved him,” he answered. “I had gone to see you, to talk with you. Then I saw the painting...and I just went out of my mind, Iason.”

Riki, who had been watching this exchange from the sofa where Iason had situated him as comfortably as he could, facedown to keep pressure off his punished flesh, listened to these words with surprise. Iason had told Raoul he loved him?

Iason remained silent, not wanting to concede that Riki’s destruction of Raoul’s masterpiece would probably have driven any artist to rage. But Riki was his pet—not Raoul’s—and Iason had dealt with him firmly and appropriately for that transgression. There was simply no excuse for Riki’s abduction and subsequent torment.

“How dare you touch MY pet, Raoul,” he said, sharply. Now he leaned closer, to whisper in the Blondie’s ear, “How dare you harm him, taking what is not yours to take.”

“If you kill me, it will mean your own destruction. You’re not entirely above the law, Iason.”

Iason knew this was true, but for Riki, this was the first time it had occurred to him that his master could not do whatever he pleased to Raoul.

“Iason!” he called out, weakly.

The Blondie turned and immediately went to his pet, crouching down to regard him with concern. “What is it, love?” he whispered.

“Is that true, what he says? What would happen to you if you killed him?”

Iason smiled, pleased with his pet’s worries for his well-being. “That would be up to Jupiter.”

Riki closed his eyes, then opened them with resolve. “Don’t kill him. I don’t want...to lose you. Let’s just do...everything else we discussed.”

“You...don’t want to lose me,” Iason repeated, slowly, savoring his pet’s words.

“Of course not,” Riki shot back, teasing. “I might get stuck with a master who’s even worse than you.”

Laughing softly, Iason did not seem to mind his pet’s stubbornly refusing to engage in further romantic banter. He had picked up on something the mongrel had not even noticed himself—Riki saw himself as a pet who belonged to a master, if not Iason, then someone else.

After well over two years of taming Riki...some progress at last.

Iason rose to his feet and returned to Raoul, enjoying the sight of the Blondie restrained and exposed so humiliatingly. He bent down close to his face so he could look in his old lover’s eyes.

“Lucky for you, Raoul, Riki is more magnanimous than you. I’ll spare your life at his request. But don’t think it’s out of love for you—he only cares about what happens to me.”

“Thank you,” Raoul whispered.

“Don’t thank me yet. This is all on one condition, Raoul. You will, from this day forward, serve me, almost as a slave serves his master. You will defer to me on every issue, and you will do my bidding, when I bid it. Although no one else will know of our unique relationship, you and I will know—as will Riki—and so that you do not forget it, I am going to brand you in the same way you branded my pet—but with my initials. And if you fail to do your duty in any way,” now Iason held up the Interceptor, “I will alert Jupiter that you have an illegal import. You know what Jupiter does to Blondies who defy her import technology laws.”

With this, Iason went to the table and retrieved the branding iron, as Raoul contemplated his situation with horror.

“Don’t do this,” he pleaded, as the Blondie turned on the unit and approached him, the tip growing red-hot.

“Why should I show you any mercy? You gave none to Riki.”

“But he’s...he’s a mongrel,” Raoul protested.

“Even so. He’s MY mongrel, but you stamped him as your own, isn’t that so?”

Delighting in the sight of Raoul begging to be excused from his punishment, Riki giggled, his mirth infuriating the Blondie, who struggled fruitlessly against his restraints.

“Iason. Please. You loved me...once. Have you forgotten?”

Now Iason leaned close to his old lover to whisper coldly in his ear. “Yes. I have.”

With that, he straightened, then applied the hot iron to the Blondie’s lower back, just above his glute in the precise place Raoul had branded Riki. Out of pride, Raoul tried not to scream, gritting his teeth and uttering a low growl, but as the branding continued, his vocalizations became louder, more anguished.

“Do you see now how you made my Riki suffer?” Iason hissed, finding that Raoul’s cries only angered him, suggesting the extent of the pain his pet had gone through.

Unable to answer, Raoul squeezed his eyes shut, his whole body shaking, as Iason completed the branding.

Iason had disappeared for a moment, and then Raoul realized he was at the table, examining the display of instruments with an affected air of indecision.

The Blondie chuckled. “How did you ever decide where to begin? I really can’t make up my mind.”

“The paddle!” Riki suggested enthusiastically from across the room.

“Ah, yes.” Iason picked up the paddle, noting its weight with anger. No wonder Riki’s bottom was so blackened. He turned it over in his hands. “This is going to hurt, I think.”

“I’m not a pet to be paddled,” Raoul snapped. “Whip me if you must. But I’m still a Blondie. I’m entitled to some respect.”

“Silence!” Iason answered, sharply. “You’re hardly in a position to be dictating how you’ll be punished. If I think you need a good paddling, you’ll get one. And...as it happens, I do.”

Now Iason walked slowly toward him, paddle in hand, smiling at Raoul’s obvious alarm.

“What’s this? You can give it but you can’t take it, isn’t that the phrase?”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Raoul breathed, eyeing the paddle with disbelief.

“Wouldn’t I?” Now Iason stood before him, and with an impressive flourish, spun the paddle around in the air, catching it easily before bringing it down, wickedly hard, on Raoul’s bare ass, a move that was celebrated by his mongrel pet with a delighted laugh.

Whack! Raoul groaned, clenching his eyes shut.

“It’s not as fun on the receiving end, I think?” Whack!

Surprised and dismayed with how much the paddle hurt, Raoul moaned, instinctively struggling against his restraints.

Whack!

“For Jupiter’s sake, Iason!” Raoul cried. “Have mercy!”

“Stop begging. Have you no pride? Take your punishment like a man.” Whack!

His groans were now outright cries, but Iason’s comment had shamed him, and he offered no more pleas for leniency.

Whack!

Raoul’s begging had put Riki into a sort of delirious state, and he giggled incessantly from the sofa, almost forgetting his own pain.

Strike after strike hit the Blondie’s exposed skin, tormenting flesh that had rarely known punishment. When at last the paddling stopped, he was trembling, a sight that was new to Iason. He had endured Raoul’s arm on several occasions—never with a paddle, however—and he was feeling a deep sense of vindication to see the Blondie so painfully humiliated, so thoroughly paddled, like a recalcitrant pet or unruly child.

This was a turning point in the strange, twisted relationship of Raoul Am and Iason Mink.

Iason had retrieved his whip and now approached Raoul with it, snapping his wrist to produce an intimidating crack that Raoul would have appreciated, had it not been his own body that was to provide reception for its fury.

“Please, Iason. You wouldn’t scar me?” Not begging. Just a horrified question from a subdued Blondie.

“I’ve set it to Accelerator, which should lessen any scarring,” Iason answered, smiling, “although it will hurt more.”

Before Raoul could really object to this, he felt the searing pain of the whip across his back, burning into this flesh. To the Blondie who was known throughout Eos as the Master of Pain and Punishment, an expert with the whip, being forced to endure the other end of a whipping was yet another humiliation. For the first time, Raoul understood the extent of the pain he delivered to disobedient pets. The pain was inconceivable, and as lash after lash tore into him, he began losing a sense of the present moment, drifting backward in time to other times and places, to childhood shames and adolescent dreams.

* * *

Raoul lost consciousness, then drifted back into cognizance. Eventually he became aware that Iason had retreated to attend to Riki, giving him a much needed hiatus from his punishment. Raoul was overcome with pain and mortification, his mind continuing to drift from one thought to another, seemingly without logical progression, the only thing linking them being Iason. He had never undergone discipline in his life, save on two other occasions—once in his childhood when he had fondled a classmate and had been whipped, pants down, with the schoolmaster’s rod in front of the entire section. The experience had been so painful—on multiple levels—that he had never again engaged in forbidden behaviors...at least until he had met Iason Mink.

Once Iason had come into his life, he found it impossible to resist the beautiful Blondie’s charms; he had pursued him unrelentingly until at last he had cornered him, one fateful day, alone in the planetarium after day session, and amazingly had managed to steal a kiss, then slip a hand down the lovely Blondie’s pants, finding an impressively engorged erection rewarding his efforts. Iason had done the unthinkable; he had allowed—even encouraged—his advances, mouth opening to accept Raoul’s tongue,

his own hand seeking his ready organ, stroking him with hurried, trembling fingers, both of them so aroused by their forbidden rendezvous that they reached orgasm rather abruptly, ejaculating clumsily onto one another's clothes.

And, of course, there was the day he finally managed to take the young Mink. He had come upon Iason in the laboratory one afternoon—seeking him out, as usual. They began fondling one another and kissing as they had now done on numerous occasions, despite how severe their punishment would be if they were discovered. Raoul turned him around, placing his hands palms down on a table, then slid his hands deftly down his body, quickly tugging down the pants of his uniform and spreading his legs with his knees before Iason could really respond. The Blondie resisted, trying to escape his design, but Raoul reached around to stroke him suggestively, whispering seductively into his ear that he would perform fellatio on him if Iason would admit him. His hardened cock twitched between Iason's legs as he began prodding him with gentle thrusts, spreading his firm cheeks and brushing up against his portal enticingly. He wanted so desperately to plunge into him that he moaned, hands rubbing anxiously down Iason's hips as he bumped more purposefully against the guarded entrance.

"This is forbidden," Iason whispered, voice shaking.

"Everything we've done together is forbidden," Raoul protested. "This is just the next step. If we're going to take the risk of being together at all, why not go all the way?"

Uncertain, but tempted, Iason hesitated as Raoul took advantage of the moment and penetrated uninvited, covering the young Blondie's mouth with his hand when Iason cried out.

"Ohhh...Iason," Raoul breathed, thrusting fully into the tight, resisting embrace. "You're...magnificent."

Iason answered that with an anguished cry that Raoul was careful to stifle with his hand.

"I'm sorry, my love," Raoul whispered. "I'll make it up to you, I promise. Try to be a little quieter."

Once he was inside, Iason decided there was no use resisting further and had endured Raoul's conquest, although he felt a little bitter with him for making his acquisition without unequivocal consent—a dynamic that would be repeated between the two Blondies time and again. Despite his initial reluctance, Iason began to enjoy the feeling of another Blondie inside him, and when Raoul sensed that he no longer resisted him, he removed his hand from his mouth and pulled back on his hips with both hands, thrusting with abandon.

"What are you doing?" Raoul suddenly gasped, widening his stance to plunge more deeply, marveling over Iason's twitching embrace, which gripped and squeezed him erotically. "Ohh...that feels so good."

"I don't know," Iason replied, closing his eyes. The experience was new for both of them, and neither of them knew the secrets of Blondie physiology. All they knew was that the forbidden things they did together brought them both pleasure.

"Keep doing that...that's brilliant, squeezing me like that."

"I don't know...what I'm doing," Iason protested, gasping with every movement, now thoroughly enjoying being fucked, and arching back to invite deeper penetration.

"Ohhh...Iason...that's it...bend over a little more....yes, exactly so." Now Raoul grunted with each thrust, plundering the young Mink as deeply and fully as he was able.

After Raoul had spent his seed that first time, he had honored his promise and explored Iason with his mouth and tongue, a project that the young Blondie welcomed with widely spread legs and glowing eyes, biting his lip and gasping until finally—hands gripping Raoul's hair urgently and thrusting his pelvis forward sensually—he ejaculated into his kneeling partner's mouth. That day the young lovers realized they would not be able to easily stop what they had started together.

While they were certainly not the only ones who disobeyed Jupiter's prohibition against Blondie coitus, at the time it felt as though they alone dared defy the law, which only fueled their desire

for one another further and made the forbidden encounters all the more salacious.

And then, once, they had been caught. Raoul was taking Iason in his room and the dorm leader happened to pass by his door, demanding entry on hearing the suspicious sounds within. That was the second time in his life Raoul was punished—this time side by side with Iason—as the two of them received a wickedly thorough thrashing by the headmaster, pants pulled humiliatingly down to their knees, though thankfully in the headmaster's private chambers. They had both opted for the most severe punishment—physical discipline—rather than have their transgression listed in the school record where Jupiter would have access.

The afternoon in the headmaster's chambers had cooled their passion for a time, not only because of the pain but because each of them was embarrassed to have cried out so pathetically. Raoul had fully intended to impress his young lover with his stoic silence in the face of pain, fantasizing how Iason would admire his virility and strength, but all this had evaporated once the headmaster's belt burned into his tender Blondie flesh. He was mortified for Iason to hear him yelp and cry out, and Iason felt similarly about Raoul, biting his lip until he drew blood in a futile attempt to avoid vocalizing his anguish. Headmaster Konami alternated strikes between the two Blondies and put the weight of his entire body behind his arm, feeling that nothing but the most brutal correction would persuade the young lovers to abandon their illicit union. He saw the way they looked at one another and he worried for them; Iason, in particular, was a favorite at the school, brilliant, soft-spoken, charismatic, and a natural leader—a great future was predicted for the young and handsome Mink. Konami was sure that upon graduation Jupiter would select Iason as an apprentice, and he was relieved when Iason chose to take physical punishment in lieu of reporting his transgression on his record. Raoul, on the other hand, he had never cared for, although it was difficult to say exactly why. Perhaps it was his mocking smile, his air of superiority, the way he challenged the professors in nearly every subject—or maybe

because, infuriatingly, the young Am was nearly always right. But he was an undeniably gifted artist, and Konami believed he was slated for an apprenticeship, too.

After their punishment session, Headmaster Konami was reassured to see that Iason and Raoul seemed to be avoiding each other, and it was true—for several weeks the thwarted lovers found it extraordinarily embarrassing to even look at one another. But all that eventually changed as the shame of their discipline faded; Raoul began to pursue Iason once again, although he found his former lover more resistant to his advances, spurning him time and again.

Finally Raoul resorted to stalking, following Iason as he went on one of his daily walks by the campus lake. He came up behind him, startling him when he pressed his body against his back. Iason, immediately recognizing Raoul's distinctive manner, had not been amused.

"Release me, Raoul," he said, impatiently.

"No. I'm not letting you go until I've ravished you."

"I mean it," Iason said, sharply.

"As do I." With that, Raoul put a hand over his mouth, dragging him over to small stretch of grass shielded by a hedge, then threw him roughly to the ground.

Iason laughed. "You wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I?" Raoul revealed his enormous erection to the gaping Iason, then pounced on him, kissing him furiously. Iason found himself responding without even meaning to. Within a matter of minutes he had Iason pinned facedown on the soft grass, tugging urgently at his pants, which he pulled down almost violently.

The sight of faint belt marks on Iason's bottom had the unexpected effect of increasing his arousal. Spreading him apart with both hands, Raoul moaned at the sight of the tiny, pink, spiral-like portal, tantalizingly inviting entry. He bent down and tasted him tentatively, eliciting a sharp gasp from the prostrate Blondie.

“What are you doing?” Iason cried, alarmed, moving as if to escape him. Raoul easily restrained him by grabbing hold of his hips, taking advantage of Iason’s elevated hip position to spread him wider for deeper exploration.

“Don’t you like it?” he whispered, excited.

Raoul tried again, this time sliding his tongue inside him. Iason struggled only initially; once Raoul became more confident and forceful in his technique, the Blondie relaxed and began moaning, something Iason rarely did. When the young Mink wiggled back, eagerly pressing his ass up against his face to solicit more stimulation, Raoul was unable to contain himself.

Without further prelude, Raoul repositioned himself and slid into his aroused lover, groaning and shivering from Iason’s vice-like grip. “I’ve missed you,” he whispered into Iason’s ear.

Shuddering, Iason didn’t reply, but Raoul could tell he was responding to him. He smiled, anxious to make his lover gasp and moan with his lingual arts, which he did upon securing his own release, completion that was so intensely pleasurable Raoul had groaned perhaps a little too loudly. But they had not been discovered, and afterwards Raoul had loved Iason so beautifully with his mouth and tongue that the young Mink found himself unable to resist Raoul’s advances from that point on...at least until Anori came along.

Once Iason had discovered Raoul’s infidelity with Anori and declared their relationship over, things had never been the same between the two Blondies. He had been pursuing Iason unsuccessfully ever since. Now, to be disciplined so savagely and mortifyingly by Iason, seemed to Raoul almost fitting, somehow, as though solidifying physically what the Blondie had felt for some time. Their roles had reversed; Iason had finally taken control. Though he was in too much pain to feel aroused by Iason’s actions, the Blondie’s authoritarian demeanor while administering the discipline was decidedly erotic—something that Raoul would revisit at a later, more private, less physically trying moment.

I.M. The initials were now burned into the Blondie's skin. And as Raoul lay there, writhing in misery, it occurred to him that Iason had only formalized what had been true for a long, long time. Raoul was a slave to Iason...and now both of them knew it.

* * *

Riki had summoned his master with a plea for some pain relief, and Iason had decided he needed to finish tending to his pet's wounds before continuing with Raoul. He contacted Medical Services to request opiates and first aid supplies.

"Would you like a medical team?" the receptionist asked, in a bored, uninterested voice.

"No. Just send me pharmaceuticals and supplies."

"In order to serve you best, we must first ascertain the nature of injuries requiring attention," she droned. "Do you have bruising, welts, or swelling?"

"Yes."

"Broken skin, lash marks, or open wounds?"

"Yes."

"Burning or branding?"

"Yes."

"Broken bones?"

"No."

"Castration, amputation or deocularization?"

"No."

"Complaints of unbearable pain?"

Here Iason smiled, certain that this humorous addition had been at the urging of Omaki Ghan.

"Yes. Be sure you bring an Opiate-6."

"Any injuries not reported here?"

"No."

"Please be advised that should your pet expire, the Taming Tower can in no way be held accountable. We urge you to admit our medical team or seek admission at Midas Medical if you believe

your pet has sustained injuries. Would you care for any additional, such as smokes, oils, or wine?"

"Smokes," Riki managed to whisper, though he was starting to drift in and out of consciousness again.

"All three. Dark Baccalias and White Moon. Any oil is fine."

"Anything else, Sir?"

"No."

"Your service comes to 10,500 credits. Please punch in your code and place your chin on the rest for retinal scan."

Iason did so, after which the transmission unceremoniously cut off, with the Taming Tower graphic whirling on the screen and a confirmation message estimating time of order arrival in 4:58 minutes. Iason was about to move away when Omaki Ghan suddenly flickered onto the screen.

"Good afternoon, Iason," Omaki said, smiling. "Just wanted to be sure you didn't require anything else—a body bag, perhaps?"

"Not at this time," Iason answered, wryly.

"Perhaps then, I could interest you in an additional service, namely, the destruction of digital footage depicting your lovely afternoon here at the Taming Tower?"

Iason turned and looked behind him, searching for the camera.

Omaki laughed, softly. "Surely you didn't think I would miss the opportunity of watching what went on behind closed doors at the Tower? As you know, I'm unapologetic about my penchant for punishment. Speaking of which, I'm simply beside myself here with what I've just witnessed. Sorry for the delay in contacting you, but I had to clean up first. I think I stained my favorite tunic."

Iason sighed. "What do you want?"

"100,000 credits."

"How do I know you'll destroy them without making copies?"

"You don't trust people, and that's a sign of intelligence," Omaki answered. "Everyone in Midas knows I have my faults. But of all people, YOU should know that my word, at least, can be trusted."

"Very well."

“Excellent decision. I know how embarrassing things can get when such footage turns up before the wrong eyes...Jupiter’s, especially. I’ll code your purchase as a line of customized punishment instruments and ship you a box of toys in a few days as a decoy—I’ll be sure to put some goodies in there I think you’ll especially enjoy.”

“You won’t be in business long if you start blackmailing your clients.”

Omaki laughed. “Iason. You’re quite amusing sometimes. What do you think my little empire here is really based on? Are you really so out of touch that you don’t know what I do? My specialty is all that is forbidden. Have you any idea how many senators, ambassadors and consulate members have appetites for that? Or have you forgotten that you came to me to have a taste of your first—”

“That’s enough,” Iason hissed. “Get on with it.”

Chuckling softly, Omaki turned suddenly turned all business. “Please punch in your code and place your chin on the—”

“You don’t have to repeat all that again.” Iason keyed in his code, and with a wink Omaki flickered off the screen, just as the door buzzed with the wanted medical supplies.

After retrieving these, Iason hurried over to Riki, who was now moaning with increasing urgency.

“I wanna go home,” he whispered.

“What about Raoul? Don’t you—”

“I don’t care anymore. Take me home.”

Now that Iason knew they were being watched, he was a little relieved that Riki had lost his desire for disciplining Raoul. He was anxious to get home, as well. He gave Riki an Opiate-6 and then decided to call Yui, Raoul’s Furniture.

Yui answered, looking surprised to see Iason.

“I am sorry, Sir Iason, but Master Raoul is not here at the present.” In fact, Yui was a little concerned. It was late and Raoul still had not returned home.

“He’s here with me. We’re at the Taming Tower. Floor 89, room Z542. He’s...going to require a little first aid. Can you come for him?”

“Of course, Sir,” Yui said, without hesitation, although privately he wondered how well he would do on the Tanagura and Midas freeways. He knew how to drive, of course, but was rarely asked to do so.

“Put your vehicle on automatic, and punch in M-EZ556 to pull up the screen for the Taming Tower,” Iason said, as if reading the anxious youth’s thoughts. “I’ll enter clearance for you to leave Tanagura. Do not contact the police or a medical unit. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Sir.” Yui was worried about these odd instructions, and wondered why his master would need first aid. He tried not to, but he began to feel a little angry at Iason Mink. What did Iason have to do with Raoul’s injuries, and why was he circumventing the medical system? Yui had training in first aid, of course, but he wasn’t a medical technician. What if his master needed professional treatment? He immediately left the apartment and located his master’s reserve vehicle, nervously punching in the instructions for an automation sequence to Midas.

After hanging up with Yui, Iason turned his attention to Riki, who was begging him for a smoke.

“You’re too weak to hold it up.”

“You can put it up to my lips, though. Please.”

Iason honored his pet’s request, helping him enjoy one of his favorite pleasures even before he poured himself some wine, of which he was in desperate need. Then he began cleaning the blood from Riki’s body and tending his wounds, a project that his pet found quite objectionable, at one point grabbing Iason’s hand in a feeble attempt to stop his ministrations.

“Come now,” Iason scolded. “You know you’ve got to be disinfected.”

Riki pouted at this, which caused his master to smile, relieved to see his pet acting normally.

“Can’t we finish this at home?”

“I’m waiting for Yui to arrive. Then we’ll go.”

At this, Raoul, who had been lying as if asleep, roused a bit. “Yui is coming?” he asked.

“Yes, he’s coming to tend you.”

“Untie me—take off these manacles,” Raoul pleaded. “Don’t let him see me like this. Iason. You must know that I’ll never have his respect if he sees me this way.”

Iason knew this was true, and so he complied, releasing him from his restraints. Raoul was so weak that he simply remained lying on the bed.

Yui arrived and took in the scene, his eyes moving back and forth between his master and Iason’s pet. He looked at Iason with confusion, but the Blondie offered no explanation. He couldn’t piece together what had gone on there, but he also knew it wasn’t his place to ask. Walking quickly without seeming to rush to his master’s side, he knelt down on one knee.

“Can I bring you anything—a drink, perhaps, Master Raoul?” he asked in a soothing voice that told his master immediately he made no judgments about what he had seen there.

“Water, Yui.”

As Yui went to retrieve the wanted potable, Iason pointed out the first aid supplies he was leaving. “You should have everything you need here. I’m taking the rest with me.”

“Yes, Sir Iason,” Yui said, bowing to show his respect, though in his heart he found it difficult to bow before him.

Nodding, Iason dumped the supplies he wanted in a container left by the medical unit, then picked Riki up—with a yelp of pain from his pet—and carried him from the room without another word to Raoul or Yui. He draped his cloak over his naked pet and took him to the rooftop to his hovercraft.

“Hey,” Riki said, perking up a bit, “is this your car?”

“Don’t you recognize it?” Iason smiled.

“But...it’s a hovercraft, too?”

“Sometimes.”

“Cool!” The mongrel’s approbation of the car’s hovering capabilities were thus established, much to his master’s amusement.

Riki’s mood quickly soured when Iason tried to situate him in the car, the pressure of the car seat excruciating on the mongrel’s sore backside.

“Why can’t I lie down in the back on my stomach?” he wailed.

“Because there would be no way to properly restrain you. The last thing I need is for you to go flying through the windshield.”

“But what are the chances of that? You’re a good driver, right?”

“The issue is not open for debate, Riki,” Iason said, firmly. “Now, just try to relax. We’ll be home in a few minutes.”

“You’re mean,” Riki sulked.

Iason smiled. “I’m only being firm because I care about you and don’t want to see you hurt.”

“I already AM hurt,” the mongrel muttered.

“Hush.”

Iason put the hovercraft in motion and took off; he had not gone far when he suddenly cursed, surprising Riki, who had never heard his master swear.

“What is it?” Riki asked.

“I’m sorry, Riki. We have to make a quick stop before we go home.”

“What!” his pet cried.

“It can’t be avoided. Jupiter’s orders.”

“Well that’s just fucking great. I’m about ready to die over here and you’re running around doing that stupid-ass computer’s bidding.”

Iason smiled at Riki’s fearlessly brazen depiction of Jupiter. “You should be starting to feel the full effect of that opiate soon, pet,” he said, and then stated, nonchalantly, “I take it you wouldn’t have any compunctions about overthrowing Jupiter.”

“Hell no,” Riki replied, then seemed to startle, looking at him. “Iason. Is that more than a joke?”

“If either of us were discovered discussing such matters, do you know what would happen to us?”

“Yes,” he admitted, quietly.

“Then be silent,” Iason warned, giving him a look that suggested there was more to the subject than the Blondie cared to discuss at the moment.

“Where are we going?”

Iason sighed. “The Dark Horse. I have something to pick up there.”

“From Jupiter?”

“Yes.”

“Is it true what people say, that Jupiter’s in love with you?”

“I’m not sure...she is capable of love,” Iason replied, softly.

“Well, she’s sure capable of fucking everyone’s lives up.”

Iason smiled at this, but said nothing. He was approaching the Dark Horse from above, its dark purple, neon holographic stallion kicking dramatically on the rooftop, one of the icons of Midas. Only as he lowered onto the roof did the same thought occur to master and pet: the Dark Horse was a pet brothel.

Why had Jupiter instructed him to go there?

Upon landing, he was immediately greeted by an attendant; only VIPs landed on the rooftop of the Dark Horse.

“Iason-sama,” the attendant said, bowing slightly. “We have been expecting you.”

“I can’t stay. I’ve come to pick up something that was left for me.”

“Of course. Right away.” The attendant spoke into his handheld, asking for Jupiter’s gift to be relayed to the rooftop. Within moments, the door to the brothel hummed open and several attendants appeared, leading a young pet on a leash toward him.

Iason blinked. “Don’t tell me it’s a pet.”

The young boy looked directly at Iason with large, light green eyes. He was an intoxicatingly pretty pet, no question—with fine features and beautiful, shoulder-length blondish-brown hair that was somewhat affectedly tousled and stylishly unkempt. The boy looked disconcertingly pleased to see Iason, smiling demurely.

“Master Iason,” he said, bowing his head. “I am honored.”

The Blondie nodded curtly, annoyed, refusing to acknowledge the pet's beauty.

"His name is Enyu. Jupiter has said you are to have him as a special token of her favor."

Sighing, Iason took the leash from the handler, pulling the young pet a little roughly toward the hovercraft. He had no choice but to accept Jupiter's gift; to do otherwise would be inconceivable. But he knew the new pet would probably not sit well with Riki, who was accustomed to having his complete attention at the penthouse. Perhaps he should situate the pet in different quarters; but that would only cause jealousy when he went to visit Enyu.

"In the back," he said, with a little push to the pet from behind. As Enyu gracefully boarded the vehicle, Iason noticed how pleasant he smelled—his hair, and some sort of faint, alluring scent. Without exactly meaning to—or perhaps for only a moment, he allowed his hand to slide down and briefly touch the youth's firm bottom, feeling an unexpected surge of carnal desire. He pulled his hand away as if burned. The last thing he needed was to become sexually infatuated with another pet.

As soon as he got into the vehicle, he could see that Riki was decidedly displeased.

"Who the fuck is this?" he demanded.

"Jupiter has given me this pet. His name is Enyu. I am counting on you, Riki, to show him the proper courtesy."

Riki and Enyu evaluated each other for a long moment. Enyu studied Riki with amazement; this was the infamous Riki the Dark, Iason's mongrel pet, who it was rumored Iason paired with, and who was known to be frequently disobedient, and just as frequently punished for it. Iason must have just finished with him, from the looks of the mongrel—his face was covered with bruises and cuts, and from what he could tell the pet was naked, wrapped in the Blondie's cloak. He wondered what Riki had done to require such violent correction. And he wondered if Iason would take him, the same way he took Riki; he certainly hoped so, and he would do everything he could to encourage the Blondie toward that end. He

felt sure that, at the very least, Iason would find that he was quite obedient.

Riki was fuming with jealousy. He looked back and forth between the beautiful pet in the back seat and his master, furious when Iason refused to meet his gaze.

“You’re not seriously keeping him are you?” he whispered.

“I don’t have a choice,” Iason replied. Then, softer, “don’t tell me you’re jealous?”

Riki snorted at this. “At that piece of pet trash?” He turned and glared at Enyu.

The new pet simply smiled back, amused. He was thrilled to be joining the household of Iason Mink and his mongrel pet and did not mind Riki’s insults. He felt confident that he could win him over, as he always did.

As for Riki, he was in an extremely foul mood. The entrance of Enyu had ruined his intimate moment with Iason. He had loved that his master had come to rescue him and was looking forward to an evening together while Iason nursed his wounds. And then perhaps they would do...other things. With this new pet in the picture, he didn’t know what to expect. And this Enyu...he was far too attractive. Yes, Riki was most assuredly jealous of him. And he was also...becoming extraordinarily...sleepy.

Riki yawned, resting his head back on the chair. He felt the seat tip back as Iason adjusted it via the control panel to a more comfortable, reclining position.

“That’s it,” Iason said, gently. “Close your eyes and go to sleep.”

Enyu watched this exchange with wonderment. What Blondie talked to his pet in such a manner? Almost as if...he loved him. Then...perhaps it was true what people said about Iason and Riki.

The mongrel groaned, muttering a few unintelligible words, and then seemed to have fallen fast asleep.

Enyu looked up and realized Iason was watching him through the rear-view mirror. His heart missed a beat or two as he gazed into his sapphire-blue Blondie eyes, which appraised him with such intensity.

“Are you Amoian?” Iason asked, finally.

“No. I’m from Xeron.”

“I thought so.”

Then, much to Enyu’s astonishment, he began speaking to him in the Xeronian common tongue.

“Where did you...learn my language?” he asked, excited.

“I have a fondness for languages. They come easily to me.”

“But I’ve heard it’s quite difficult to learn.”

“I did not find it especially so.”

“How did you know I was from Xeron?”

“Because of your eyes, of course. Your pupils are elliptical.”

“Most people don’t notice so quickly.” Enyu raised an eyebrow, intrigued with his master’s perceptiveness, as well as his ability to speak his language—words he had not heard since leaving Xeron.

“Then...you were raised at Hiroshi’s palace? You have no inbred controls?”

Now Enyu smiled. “You need not worry. I assure you, I will obey your every command, Master Iason.” Now he lowered his voice. “Your...EVERY command.”

Iason’s lip curled up a little with this suggestive remark, and he found his heart beating a little faster. So, Jupiter had no problem with sending him a sex-pet from Xeron, but he resented his keeping a mongrel? He shook his head, mystified. Perhaps this was her compromise—she would provide him with a toy of her choosing, but she would expect him to give up his mongrel pet.

But Iason knew that was never going to happen. He would never give up Riki. However, there was no reason he could not enjoy this new pet, especially if it would please Jupiter. However, he was not altogether sure if he was perhaps reading too much in Enyu’s manner.

“Have you been shown?” he asked, boldly.

“Only at the palace, at a private show for visiting dignitaries.”

“And how came you to Amoi?”

“I was purchased on Xeron for the length of a voyage and sold here on arrival.”

“I see.” Iason smiled, then paused before asking his next question. “And did your master copulate with you?”

Enyu averted his eyes. “Forgive me, Master Iason, but I am compelled to keep in confidence any matters regarding my former master.”

“Well said,” the Blondie answered softly, with a nod.

“However,” Enyu continued, his eyes now meeting Iason’s in the mirror, “I can tell you that, should you desire sexual gratification, Master Iason, I would strive to please you however I could.”

“Is that so,” Iason breathed. Not a question...just a statement. He adjusted himself, spreading his legs a little wider. “And what if it pleases me to watch you with Riki?”

Surprised, Enyu collected his thoughts before answering. “I am ready to do your bidding, whatever it might be.” Privately he hoped this bidding would be alone with the beautiful Blondie, not with the dark-eyed mongrel who clearly had already taken a strong dislike to him.

Pleased with the beautiful young pet’s seductive and fawning manner, Iason fell silent, looking away. He was thinking about Xeronians; from what he remembered, the males actually cycled, rutting on the new moon. He wondered how their cycle would react to the twin moons of Amoi. He had always wanted to see a Xeronian in heat and had heard they were quite irresistible and insatiable; Xeronian pets had to be chained up during the five-day rutting period. Now he began looking forward to having Enyu at the penthouse. Riki’s jealousy might be amusing. At the very least, the Blondie wouldn’t be bored any time soon.

* * *

“Daryl. Open your eyes, love. Please.” Katze continued pleading with his lover, tears falling from his face onto Daryl’s.

With a groan, Daryl stirred.

Excited, Katze leaned close to him. "That's it. Wake up, darling."

Daryl's eyes fluttered open. Squinting, he stared at Katze in surprise. "Katze?"

"Yes! Oh...yes, sweetheart. I'm here." Thrilled that Daryl had finally regained consciousness, Katze was overjoyed, pressing kisses all over his face.

Daryl smiled. "What...happened?"

"Don't you remember?"

The grey-eyed youth considered, the images of Raoul and Riki suddenly flooding his mind. "Riki! He took Riki!" he cried, trying to sit up.

"Don't move! Iason knows; he went to get Riki. He'll find him." Katze was not at all sure the Blondie would be able to find his pet without the tracer, but he didn't want Daryl to worry about it.

"Raoul...threw me," Daryl remembered.

"So it appears," Katze said, then muttered, "that fucking bastard."

"My...chest hurts."

"That's why you can't move. Help is coming. They should be here soon, I promise."

"Does this mean...the punishment's off for tonight?"

Katze laughed softly at Daryl's sense of humor, although he couldn't deny he was glad for a postponement of the whipping. He certainly hadn't been looking forward to it.

"No, because I'll punish you if you move again. I told you to stay still," Katze scolded, after Daryl tried to squirm into a sitting position.

"Is that a promise?" Daryl smiled, then closed his eyes.

"Don't close your eyes. Stay awake, love."

Daryl sighed, ignoring him.

"Daryl! Mind me, or I'll turn you over my knee and spank you—and this time it won't be for fun."

Opening his eyes, Daryl smiled mischievously. "I love it when you threaten to spank me."

“Daryl. I was so scared,” Katze said, his voice wavering with emotion.

“I’ll be okay. It’s...good to see you again, Katze.”

Sighing, Katze answered by leaning down to offer a gentle kiss to his blood-stained lips. At that moment the medical team finally arrived, immediately determining that Daryl needed to go to Tanagura Medical. Katze went with them, holding Daryl’s hand the entire time. Although he had been crying over Daryl the entire evening, for the first time the unthinkable had really occurred to him.

He could lose Daryl.

Chapter 34

Jupiter's Gift

Riki woke with a start. He started to cry out, but was comforted by the feathery light caress of his master's hair brushing against the side of his face and its exotic, intoxicating scent.

"Iason?" he whispered. The room was dark. Riki lay facedown, staring at the familiar vase in the corner of the room. So. He was home...and in Iason's room.

The Blondie leaned down and kissed him on the temple. "I'm here." In fact, Iason had stayed with Riki from the moment he brought him home, carrying him from the car up to the penthouse and then positioning him gently on the bed. He had taken advantage of Riki's drugged state to finish tending to his wounds so as to cause his pet less discomfort, silently cursing Raoul the entire time. When he reached the brand-mark, he felt particularly annoyed. He would have to do something about it; he couldn't have his pet bearing the stamp of another Blondie. Already he was planning to contact the head of Tanagura Reconstruction to find out what could be done. Surely, if castrated servants could be restored to sexually functional men, there was a way to remove a brand. He seemed to remember something about jeweled plate grafts that carried designs or initials. If Riki was going to be marked with anyone's initials, they were going to be his.

With a warm, bare hand, Iason stroked Riki's hair. "Still in pain?"

"I feel...actually pretty good," Riki said, smiling. "Gotta love those opiates." He rolled over onto his back, wincing a little, but wanting to see Iason's face.

For a long moment, they stared at one another, reliving the horrors of the day, and revisiting through their eyes their earlier declarations of love.

“How’s Daryl?” Riki asked, suddenly remembering his fallen friend.

“They’ve taken him to Tanagura Medical. Katze will call when they know anything.”

“Is it that serious?” his pet cried, alarmed.

Pressing a finger to his lips, Iason quieted him. “You’re not to worry about it. He’s in good hands. And...Katze is with him.”

Placated, Riki fell silent for a moment, then his eyes snapped angrily. “Where’s that stupid pet?”

Laughing, Iason looked up to see Enyu watching them from the great hall. He had completely forgotten about Jupiter’s gift as soon as they had returned home. Enyu had followed him uncertainly, surprised to see the Blondie carry his pet into what was obviously the master bedroom. He stood outside the bedroom, not wanting to intrude, but wondering why no one came to wait on him. The stench of urine soon drew his attention, and he stared in confusion at the disarray of the great hall, noting the urinal toppled over and the mess on the floor. Perhaps there had been a disturbance of some kind? But where were Iason’s attendants—Furniture, as they were called on Amoi? When the Blondie continued to ignore him, Enyu had found an unobtrusive chair near a corner and sat down, waiting.

Now, after several hours of being completely ignored, Enyu realized that his new master had finally noticed him. Straightening up, he hoped to be addressed and told what to do.

Iason turned back to Riki. “I should get him settled in. To be honest, I’d forgotten all about him, and he’s probably been waiting for instruction for hours.”

Pleased with his master’s apparent disinterest in the new pet, Riki smiled. “Come back,” he urged.

“I will.”

Riki reached out and took hold of Iason's hand, looking seductively into his eyes, his voice lowering to a whisper. "Will you love me tonight?"

The Blondie leaned closer, eyes shining with his own urgent desire. "Yes, Riki." He brought his pet's hand to his lips to offer a kiss. "Tonight, you may do whatever you wish."

Excited by this offer, the mongrel grinned, immediately planning the evening's pleasure.

Iason rose and went to deal with Jupiter's gift. Enyu stood up on his arrival, relieved that the Blondie was finally addressing him.

"You...were not expected," Iason said. "And Daryl is not here to wait on you, so you'll have to fend for yourself tonight. If you're hungry, you can find food in there," he pointed to the kitchen, "and I'll show you to your room."

Turning on his heel, Iason headed toward the guest wing. He would have to put Enyu there, since the rooms in the main house were all taken. The guest suites had not been used since Ambassador Anori had stayed with him—nearly a lifetime ago—but Iason always had housekeeping keep the rooms in order on the off chance that they might be needed again. Iason had been so burned from Anori's visit that he had been quite reluctant to invite other guest to his home, choosing instead to lodge dignitaries in the posh suites of downtown Tanagura.

He entered the codes to access the guest wing, the door humming open with an eerie echo down the long hall. With ten suites and indoor/outdoor pools—not filled, currently—the guest wing was a palace in its own right, one that had been designed to woo dignitaries, ambassadors and other VIPs of interest to the Syndicate. It was perhaps a shame he did not use it, especially now, when Iason no longer cared what happened between Anori and Raoul. But more than this, the Blondie knew that his home life had become so deviant, he was reluctant to give outsiders access to it. Especially since he acquired Riki, he had become more private, intensely so, finding he did not care for the company of the Elite as much as his own beloved pet.

Iason opened the first suite on the right, leading Enyu inside. The Xeronian entered, eyes widening as he took in the luxurious accommodations—silken sheets on an immense bed, a miniature bar and kitchenette, a holographic projector, a furnished living area and private bath. All just for him?

“The kitchenette has not been used in years, so if you want food or drink, you’ll need to bring it from the main kitchen. The bar should be fully stocked, but you are limited to one drink a day, after 10:00, always. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Master Iason.”

The Blondie looked at him for a moment, his unusual attire attracting his attention. The Xeronian wore a long, flowing robe of a shimmering, golden fabric that was belted at his narrow waist, almost in the style of the ancient Amoians.

“I’ll have a tailor sent for you tomorrow to draw up your wardrobe,” he said.

“Would you like me to undress now?” Enyu asked, boldly.

A little taken aback at this, Iason paused before replying, looking directly into the young pet’s light green eyes, which in the subdued lighting of the suite had a feline quality, elliptical pupils dilating slightly.

“I meant, would you like to examine me for flaws?”

The Blondie was tempted. He was quite curious to see the beautiful Xeronian in his natural state, although he knew Riki would be furious if he discovered them. However, it was standard protocol to inspect a new pet; there was nothing odd in Enyu’s suggesting it. Closing the door as a precaution, he nodded.

“Proceed.”

Smiling slightly, Enyu slowly untied his belt, his robe opening and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, sliding to the floor.

Iason’s lips parted as he took in the handsome form of his new pet. He was long-limbed and sleek, with a decidedly sensual quality, and looked to be extraordinary fit, his abdomen and pelvic region enticingly carved with tiny hollows. His upper body was perfectly sculpted—not bulky or overly muscular, but the Blondie’s eyes were

drawn to his genitals, where an unmistakable erection was in progress. It pleased him that the pet became aroused simply by his scrutiny.

“Turn around,” he whispered.

Enyu did so, offering a view even more appealing to the now aroused Blondie. The pet’s substantial, smooth buttocks begged to be fondled and spread. Iason suddenly had a powerful desire to take the lovely Xeronian, plundering him with his own now fully ready erection.

As if cognizant of his thoughts, Enyu spread his legs and bent forward, resting his torso on the back of a chair to offer his master a better view of his charms.

It was too much. Iason strode forward, and with both hands spread him further apart, pushing him forward to get a closer look at the enticingly small portal. Then, with a single finger, he explored his new pet, penetrating him gently. He could barely get his finger in, the pet was so tight. Iason closed his eyes, imagining how good it would feel to be inside this new pet, whose flirtatious, seductive manner decidedly fueled his lust. Enyu did not move, but seemed to welcome his attentions, gasping softly. He felt his Blondie master shudder, then remove his finger. Smiling, Enyu waited to be ravished. He knew the Blondie’s enormous size would make it painful, but he didn’t care, marveling over how quickly he had seduced the great Iason Mink.

With shaking fingers, Iason unfastened his trousers. He hardly knew what he was doing, only that he desperately wanted to copulate with this intriguing new pet. He pressed himself up against Enyu’s portal, then hesitated.

What about Riki? Wasn’t Riki waiting for him, eager for a night of lovemaking? Was he really going to spend himself now, with a pet whose only really claim on him was his novelty? Surely, he would rather see Riki in this same position, bent over so invitingly. Although...Riki had been through too much trauma to be penetrated yet tonight. Iason would have to be satisfied with the mongrel’s considerable lingual skills.

Enyu, sensing that his master hesitated, bent forward and spread his legs a little wider, rocking up on his toes and arching his back erotically, hoping to persuade him to proceed by offering a more inviting view.

Biting his lip after issuing a breathy moan, Iason bumped up against Enyu, gently, tantalizingly, torn between wanting to plunge into what promised to be an exquisitely tight fuck, and saving himself for the one he truly loved, his Riki.

And then, he began to berate himself. What was he doing here with this new pet who meant absolutely nothing to him? It was not like him to be so easily distracted.

Once he clarified the choice in his mind, his decision was easy. Enyu was tempting...but not tempting enough. If it was a choice between Enyu and Riki, the mongrel would win every time. Jupiter's gift couldn't come between him and his pet. Not five hours before, they had confessed their love for one another. He wasn't about to ruin that with misdirected lust.

Iason abruptly backed away, fastening his trousers. "Get dressed," he said, sternly, almost angrily.

At the door he stopped, looking back at the clearly disappointed and confused Enyu. "Speak of this to no one."

"Yes, Master Iason," Enyu replied, with a slight bow.

Iason left the suite, his emotions confused. It was normal to be aroused by a pet, but why was he so attracted to Enyu? Was it because he was Xeronian? And why had Jupiter offered him as a gift? He couldn't understand his own passions, nor Jupiter's motives. There was no question that his heart belonged to Riki. No question that he would rather be with Riki than anyone else in the world. So why had he been so tempted—almost to the point of hurling his household into chaos? If Riki knew what had almost happened....

Iason smiled. He could just see Riki's tantrum now. Perhaps that was what Jupiter had in mind, pitting the two pets against each other in competition for his affections. Jupiter no doubt hoped he would tire of Riki's disobedience and sell him to a brothel; she had

made no secret of her disapproval—perhaps even jealousy—of his mongrel pet. Could it be she was willing to temporarily relax her prohibitions against coitus with a pet in return for his giving up Riki? Or, worse, perhaps she was testing him, sending Enyu to deliberately seduce him in order to see if he would violate her prohibition.

He knew he could not keep Enyu. Although he could not get rid of him immediately after acquiring him, somehow he would have to think of a way to remove him from his household. Perhaps he would need to set him up in another suite. Something would have to be done. The Xeronian was far too tempting, and Iason knew that meant nothing but trouble.

His worries were swept away when he saw Riki lying on his bed, legs spread, stroking a throbbing erection.

“Where were you?” he demanded. “I’m about ready to come.”

Ignoring his question, Iason got undressed. “What would you like, my pet?”

“Lie facedown and spread your legs,” came the immediate reply.

Smiling, Iason obeyed, enjoying the warmth of the sheets where his pet had just been.

“Is this oil?” Riki asked, holding up a vial that was among the first aid supplies.

“Yes.”

“Awesome.” Now Riki poured the oil on himself and then groaned, stopping, his oiled hand held mid-air. “Fuck.” He was so aroused he was about ready to ejaculate, the lubrication of the oil pushing him even closer to the edge. For a moment he simply waited in agony, trying to get control of his arousal. He was frozen, like a statue, afraid to move or breathe.

Iason couldn’t help but laugh softly at his pet’s plight.

“It’s not fucking funny!” Riki cried, annoyed.

“I am sorry, my love,” Iason replied. “I didn’t mean to hurt your mongrel pride.”

“I suppose you Blondies never have this problem,” Riki growled. “Everything you do is so fucking perfect.”

“Not so,” the Blondie replied, softly.

“Oh yeah? Have you ever ejaculated before you meant to?”

“Oh yes. With you, in fact. It is nothing...to be ashamed of.”

The conversation had helped Riki to regain control, and now he pressed himself up to Iason’s entrance, sliding in quickly with an almost anguished groan.

“Fucking Jupiter,” he breathed. He lay on top of the Blondie as he thrust into him, moaning with every movement. He felt like he was in pain, trying to keep from releasing.

He wasn’t going to last. For once, Riki wished he could really give Iason a good fucking without having to worry about coming too soon.

“Iason,” he gasped, “will you let me fuck you again later?”

“Yes, my love.”

Excited by this promise, Riki abandoned all restraint and plunged into the Blondie with enthusiasm. Iason began his exquisite squeezing and twitching against him, coaxing him easily to orgasm, Riki’s hot semen pumping hypnotically into his master’s tight passage.

Iason only allowed his pet a few minutes to rest before he insisted on being pleased. He was so aroused his hands trembled as he held his hardened cock up against the mongrel’s lips.

“You’re ready, too,” Riki noted, smiling, flicking a tongue across the Blondie’s already wet head as he slid a hand around the engorged shaft.

“Yes,” Iason conceded, anxiously playing with the mongrel’s dark hair. He found that he felt a little guilty that part of his arousal had been garnered elsewhere. It was absurd for a Blondie master to feel guilt towards a pet, and yet his feelings for Riki had always exceeded the expected.

Riki took him into his mouth, gently sucking, as his tongue slid expertly around the head in slow, sensual circles.

Iason closed his eyes, his lips parting with a soft moan. Suddenly, he longed for something a little more intense. Grabbing hold of Riki’s head, he slid completely into the mongrel’s mouth,

then began thrusting, slowly at first, then faster, until finally he was fucking him pretty hard. Riki relaxed his throat and allowed Iason to do as he wished, feeling a little surprised with his master's violent acquisition, since his master usually preferred something a little more gentle and slow.

Groaning and gasping now with each thrust, Iason closed his eyes and threw back his head as he finally climaxed in his pet's mouth, a release so deliciously sweet that he shivered, tiny post-coital shudders of pleasure continuing down his back for some time afterwards.

He looked down at Riki, who watched him with shining eyes. "I guess you enjoyed that."

"It was...perfect."

"Come here," Riki commanded, holding his arms out to him.

The Blondie eased down onto the bed and took Riki into his arms, and for a long time they simply lay together thus.

"Iason?" Riki finally asked.

"Yes?"

"Are you attracted to Enyu?"

Iason sighed, wishing his pet had not asked him. He did not want to lie to Riki, but he knew his answer would hurt him. "It is nothing worth speaking of," he said evasively.

"I guess that's a yes, then," Riki sulked.

The Blondie smiled, stroking his face gently. "You're the one I love," he reminded him with a soft whisper.

"If you love me, then get rid of him."

"It's not so easy. He's a gift, from Jupiter."

"That's all the more reason. I don't trust Jupiter."

Iason considered this for a moment, privately agreeing with his pet's proffered analysis.

"Are you going to fuck him?" Riki demanded.

"That's none of your concern."

"You are! You fucking are!" Riki bolted upright, furious, then began pounding Iason's chest with his fists.

Iason easily restrained him by grabbing hold of his wrists. "Calm down, Riki," he said, sharply.

"You lied to me. You said you loved me." Dark eyes glared at him accusingly. "Why did I believe you?"

"I do love you," the Blondie replied, then laughed softly. "Are you really so jealous, Riki?"

"Yes, I'm fucking jealous." Riki fell back down onto his back, stiffly and dramatically, sighing loudly. "This has been the worst fucking day of my life."

Smiling, Iason rolled over onto his side, kissing Riki's face and throat as he ran a hand down his body and between his legs. "What about now?"

"Keep going," the mongrel whispered, closing his eyes.

The Blondie nuzzled against his cheek, then kissed him, slowly, languidly, tongue swirling in his pet's mouth, a long, deliciously sensuous kiss that stirred deeper chords of passion within both master and pet.

"Now?" Iason kissed his throat provocatively, moving down to his nipple where he sucked and nibbled almost roughly, eliciting gasps of pleasure from the now squirming mongrel.

"Yeah...keep...going."

Suddenly Iason was overcome with lust. He got up on his knees, raking his hands up and down his pet's body wildly, his eyes smoldering with desire. Riki responded to this with a moan and a jerking erection, his whole body twitching when the Blondie began working him with his hand.

"Take me in your mouth," he pleaded, groaning when he felt the hot wetness of his master's mouth enveloping him, his tongue wiggling provocatively against him.

"Ohhh," Riki breathed, fingers playing with the Blondie's soft hair. "That's...so good."

Now the mongrel got up on his elbows to watch his master pleasure him, smiling at the sight of the beautiful Blondie between his legs. But he wasn't about to forget Iason's offer.

“That’s enough,” he ordered. “Now, get on your hands and knees.”

Smiling at his pet’s commands, Iason obeyed, presenting himself.

“Spread your knees wider,” Riki whispered. “And put your head down on the bed.”

The Blondie did so, giving his pet a view so tantalizing it made his stomach clench. Retrieving the vial, Riki lubricated himself again, this time able to enjoy this simple act without danger of premature release.

“Ahhh,” he moaned, stroking himself for a moment, the delicate, distinctive sound of his lubricated organ sliding in his hand an independent source of arousal to master and pet alike, reminiscent of Riki’s early days as Iason’s pet, when he had performed for his master by masturbating on demand.

Shivering, he guided his ready member up to the waiting entrance and then sunk into its depths, groaning from the Blondie’s grip around his engorged organ. Pulling out slowly, he slid in again, testing his volatility. His confidence established, the mongrel commenced with a good, hard fucking, something he had always wanted to do with Iason, nails digging slightly into the Blondie’s flesh as he pulled back on his hips violently, the loud slap of his pelvis against Iason’s buttocks verifying the intensity of his thrusts.

Iason was beside himself with lust, fully enjoying his pet’s enthusiasm, savoring the feeling of being exposed and plundered as well as the sounds of Riki’s pleasure. His passion was spiraling out of control and he began to crave a good, hard conquest of his own, the feel of Riki’s tight grip when taken violently. Without success, he tried to redirect his thoughts to other images; Riki would certainly be too sore to be taken tonight.

When Riki finally reached his peak, his sex cries exploding into the quiet house, it was all Iason could do to keep from leaping up immediately. He rose up, slowly, and when he turned and Riki saw the look on his face, he was startled; he knew exactly what that look meant.

“Riki,” Iason breathed, urgently pushing him facedown on the bed. “I want you.”

Surprised, Riki did not resist, although when the Blondie lay on top of him and spread his legs apart forcefully with his knees, he instinctively struggled, remembering how roughly Raoul had used him and anticipating the residual soreness.

Iason shushed him, placing a hand over his mouth. “Forgive me, pet,” he whispered, then proceeded to take Riki far more violently than he should have.

Riki cried out, confused and hurt by his master’s actions. Iason was simply too aroused to give much thought to what he was doing. He was literally shaking. He relished his pet’s hot, strangely lubricated fit, and thrust into him urgently, almost angrily. He felt as though he couldn’t get enough of him, and he began moaning and murmuring excitedly to Riki, who was trembling beneath his formidable weight. Iason spread his cheeks apart for deeper penetration, grunting now with each thrust in a way that the mongrel had never heard him do before.

Then, a pathetic whimper escaped the mongrel’s lips, the sound somehow piercing into Iason’s rational mind, forcing his attention. He was hurting Riki, his beloved pet who had already been through torture at the hands of Raoul.

The Blondie withdrew suddenly, pumping himself vigorously to release his lust on the mongrel’s punished backside. As his semen sprayed across Riki’s bottom and lower back, Iason stared at his bruises and lashmarks, mortified that he had been so rough with him, so soon after his trauma. And then he looked at his own organ and saw that it was streaked with the blood of his pet. He looked at his hand...more blood.

“What have I done?” he said aloud, falling onto the bed and rolling Riki on top of him to hold him close. His pet was trembling in his arms. “I’ve hurt you. I’m...so sorry, love.”

Although Riki had been hurt, he was surprised that Iason had pulled out in the end, and now his master seemed so remorseful,

hugging him close, his hands shaking as he stroked his hair. He sighed, closing his eyes.

“Forgive me,” the Blondie repeated. “I don’t know what I was thinking.”

“It’s okay,” the mongrel replied. “I know what it’s like to really wanna fuck someone without thinking about what you’re doing.”

“Is that so?” Iason said, with mock sternness, relieved at how quickly Riki seemed to recover. “And who...would that have been?”

“You think I’d be stupid enough to tell you that?”

Iason smiled. “Suppose I force you to tell me with a good hard spanking?”

“You’re just trying to intimidate me into telling you, when we both know you won’t do it.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of yourself, pet. Perhaps I’ll just wait a few days to spank you. You already have one spanking in the bank—don’t think I’ve forgotten.”

“Oh yeah?” Riki smiled, nuzzling against Iason’s chest. This was the Iason he knew, the master that would never hurt him—unless, of course, he was punishing him, in which case the Blondie knew exactly how to make him beg for mercy.

“Do you forgive me?” Iason whispered in his ear.

“Yes, Iason.” Now Riki smiled mischievously, “As long as you let me fuck you again tomorrow.”

Iason laughed softly. “I’ll do better than that, pet. You’ve been through pure hell today. You can do with me what you will for the next seven days.”

“Seven days?” Riki cried, nearly ecstatic at the thought. “Whatever I want, for seven days?”

“Yes.”

“And will you promise me I won’t be punished for seven days?”

“No, pet.”

“Iason!” Riki pounded his chest with mock anger and the Blondie laughed, delighted with his pet’s playfulness.

The phone was ringing.

“Katze!” Riki predicted.

Iason got up and answered it quickly, nodding at Riki to let him know his guess was correct.

“How is he?”

“Not good.” Katze spoke grimly. He was tired, stressed from hours of worrying.

“What did they say?”

“He has internal injuries. They had to take him into surgery. He’s...lost a kidney.”

“He can function with one kidney,” Iason said, reassuringly.

“The other one was damaged, too.”

Iason paused, digesting this information. “Anything else?”

“Three broken ribs, lots of bruising, internal bleeding...that’s mostly it. They’re...making me leave now.”

“Katze. I need you to come here. I need you to take over Daryl’s duties while he’s hospitalized.”

Surprised, Katze hesitated for a moment. “What about my work?”

“Don’t worry about it. I need you here.”

“Sure.” Iason heard the sound of a lighter and then Katze’s distinctive, deep inhalation as the auburn-haired youth lit up a smoke.

“Jupiter’s sent me a gift—a pet. From Xeron. I need you to help me with him.”

“Xeronian, huh?” Katze’s interest was piqued, though only mildly. Any other day this would have intrigued him to no end—but not today. “Bet he’s gorgeous.”

Iason avoided affirming or denying this with an evasive reply. “He seems...unpredictable somehow. I can’t put my finger on it exactly. I don’t want...any trouble.”

Katze could only guess what the Blondie meant by “any trouble.” But something in Iason’s voice told him that he was disturbed by the Xeronian pet. After hanging up, he went back to Daryl’s room one last time. He was no longer allowed to enter and so just stood, staring through the window at his lover who was now

completely sedated. He hated leaving, deplored the thought of Daryl waking up in the middle of the night, frightened and alone.

“You can’t smoke in here,” one of the nurses yelled, practically jumping over the medical station to get at him, as though he was holding a bomb.

“Sorry.” Katze tossed the butt to the ground and stamped it out, then turned to leave. So. He was going back to the penthouse tonight, to resume his old duties. It had been...a long time. Somehow, the thought of being near Iason and Riki, and in Daryl’s home, was comforting to him.

* * *

Riki woke to the comforting smells of breakfast cooking and the aroma of fresh-brewed coffee.

“Mmmm...I’m starving,” he mumbled. He looked over at Iason, who was still sound asleep, marveling over how beautiful the Blondie looked while sleeping. Mischievously, he pulled the covers from him so he could get a look at his handsome body. Seven days of fucking paradise...literally. Riki was beside himself with excitement, almost completely forgetting about the trauma of the day before. Iason had given him another Opiate-6 before bed, and he was feeling good.

Iason opened his eyes, squinting from the light. He realized that he was lying completely exposed and that his pet was ogling him. Smiling, he pulled Riki close to him. “Morning, love,” he whispered, his voice raspy from sleep.

“I hope you don’t want sex,” Riki announced. “Because I want breakfast.”

“If I want sex, we’re having sex,” Iason replied. “In fact, we might have it now just because of that remark.”

“You’ll have to catch me first!” Jumping up from his bed, his pet ran naked out of the bedroom into the great hall.

“Riki!” Iason scolded, but unable to suppress a smile. “Put some clothes on this instant!”

“I thought you liked me naked,” came the mongrel’s saucy reply. “Anyway I thought we were having sex.”

Giggling, Riki proceeded to streak around the hall, suddenly skidding to a halt when he saw Enyu. The Xeronian was watching him from the corner of the room where he had quietly found a seat, interested in Riki’s exhibition. He was rather alarmed at the sight of the mongrel’s backside—the pet was blackened with bruises on this buttocks and thighs, his back showed whip marks, and he appeared to have been burned—the initials R.A. were clearly branded onto his skin. Were those Riki’s initials? Despite the mongrel’s compromised state, he seemed to be in remarkably good spirits.

It was clear to Enyu that the pet had spent the night with his master; he had heard the sounds of their sex not long after Iason had left his suite, which had excited him beyond containment. He had crept from his suite to stand outside their door, stroking himself, wishing for a glimpse of their copulation but finding the sounds of their pleasure stimulating enough to bring him quickly to orgasm. Now he knew the rumors were true; and neither Riki nor Iason seemed to make a secret of their illicit union.

Iason emerged from the bedroom wearing only a pair of flowing silk trousers. The sight of the beautiful Blondie so scantily clad, his muscles rippling beneath his soft blonde hair, excited Enyu. He was reaching his interval, which meant that he was now easily aroused. He had masturbated twice that morning already, and now he longed to fondle himself again, but dared not—not without Iason’s consent. He might have to retreat to his room once again. By his reckoning, the new moon was in two days. And then—only chains could keep him from copulating whenever and wherever he wanted. Even if his hands were restrained, he would still ejaculate. It was impossible to stop. And then...the reluctant Blondie would be unable to resist him. Enyu smiled.

Riki, thinking the smile was directed at him, scowled. “What are you smiling at?” he demanded, hands on hips.

Katze emerged from the kitchen, and seeing Riki, completely naked, legs apart in a defensive stance, his penis shy and drooping,

burst out laughing. It was the first time he had laughed in awhile—and it felt good. Riki, finding Katze's laughter infectious, began laughing, too, thrusting his pelvis disrespectfully toward Enyu, as though celebrating his inappropriate nakedness. Suddenly he stopped, moving a little closer and bending to look in his face.

"What the—what the fuck is wrong with your eyes?"

"I'm Xeronian."

"You look like a freaking cat!"

Iason came up behind Riki and gave him a slight little spank, barely smacking him but making the punished mongrel wince. "Get dressed," he ordered, his voice now firm and uncompromising.

Riki obeyed, stomping off grumpily.

The Blondie nodded at Enyu, but to the Xeronian's disappointment, quickly turned away.

"You cleaned up," Iason noted, grateful to Katze for taking care of the mess in the great hall.

Katze nodded. It had been difficult wiping up the blood where Daryl had lain, but he couldn't stand the sight of it, and the stench of Riki's urine all over the floor was nothing short of revolting. He had slept in Daryl's room, feeling some comfort just lying in his lover's bed, but it had hurt, too. He was beside himself with worry over Daryl and anxious to visit the hospital; but would Iason allow him to go? Unable to sleep, he had risen early and cooked an enormous breakfast—eggs, bacon, pancakes, krevlians, biscuits, sausage, yuntungs, sweet rolls, and of course, coffee.

Katze's breakfast turned out to be just what everyone needed. Riki, as usual, was ravenous, and Iason found that he was unusually hungry. Enyu was also drawn to the table, his metabolism revved up for his interval, which gave him a nearly insatiable appetite.

"Sit down, Katze," Iason said, motioning to a chair, after the auburn-haired youth had served them.

Thus commenced the first breakfast among the odd crew—a mongrel pet and a Xeronian, the leader of the black market underground, recently resuming Furniture duties, and the head of the Syndicate, Iason Mink.

“This is fucking brilliant, Katze,” Riki proclaimed.

“Don’t talk with food in your mouth, Riki,” Iason scolded.

Enyu smiled slightly at this reprimand, a movement that immediately caught Riki’s attention.

“What the fuck are you smiling at?”

Enyu wisely choose not to answer.

“Hey! I’m talking to you, cat-boy!” The mongrel pointed his fork at Enyu.

Iason grabbed his hand, slamming it down to the table, then bent to whisper in his ear. “That’s enough. Understood?”

Sulking, Riki shot Enyu a black look, infuriated when the Xeronian gazed back at him with unveiled disdain.

“But...he’s looking at me...that way,” Riki whispered.

As soon as Iason looked at Enyu, the youth’s face was all innocence, eyes wide.

The Blondie gave his mongrel pet a warning glance and resumed eating. As soon as Iason looked away, Enyu wrinkled his nose at Riki, delighted with how easily he became flustered. He had given up on his plan to win the mongrel over; teasing him was much more entertaining.

“Look at him now!” Riki yelled, punching Iason in the arm and causing him to drop his utensil.

“Riki!” Iason bellowed, rising up and yanking him to his feet.

“But he—”

“Hush!” Annoyed, Iason dragged him off to this bedroom, closing the door behind them.

Katze and Enyu listened, hoping to hear what was going on.

Now Katze considered the Xeronian pet before him, wondering what had just happened. He had been far too engrossed in his worries about Daryl to notice whatever had gone on between the two pets. There was no question the Xeronian was attractive. But there was something about this Enyu he didn’t like, and he suspected the youth had deliberately provoked Riki.

Enyu refused to make eye contact with him. He was, in fact, quite uncomfortable with an attendant eating at the table with him

and wondered why Iason allowed it. The Blondie was quite unorthodox in many ways, it seemed. He sensed the Furniture wanted to make conversation with him and he hoped to discourage him by ignoring him and sending out negative, repelling energy.

Inside Iason's bedroom, Riki was pleading his case to his irritated master, who was trying to decide what to do with his unruly charge. He needed a spanking, at least to curb his behavior from the start, if they were all going to survive in the penthouse together. But he knew Riki was too bruised to tolerate much discipline. Compromising, he held Riki standing, arms pinned to his back, pants up, administering a series of hard spansks to his sore bottom, just enough of a spanking to elicit yelps of misery. Riki thrust his pelvis forward, moving up onto his toes in a futile attempt to escape his master's arm. It was hardly his most brutal spanking, but to the mongrel's punished flesh, it was almost as effective.

Wailing, Riki struggled in the Blondie's grip, the injustice of his punishment nearly as upsetting to him as the pain. He hated Enyu. And the thought that Enyu could hear him being punished filled him with rage. No doubt the Xeronian delighted in his misery. One thing Riki knew...he would get even.

His punishment doled out, Iason released Riki's arms, bending down to shake him. "Now you mind me, Riki. I mean it. Next time I'll put you over my knee, bruises or no," Iason warned.

Riki made no reply, furious at being treated once again like a child, and determined to get his revenge, even if it meant more punishment.

Enyu did indeed relish the sounds of his rival pet's cries, and was unable to suppress a triumphant smile from creeping onto his lips.

"I wouldn't be too overjoyed, if I were you," Katze advised. "Master Iason won't hesitate to do the same to you, if you give him cause."

"I don't know what you mean. Why would I give my master any cause to punish me? I'm not an uncouth mongrel like Riki."

"No," Katze said, thoughtfully. "You're not."

The bedroom door hummed open and Iason returned to the table, eyes averted. Riki was some time in coming, feeling too humiliated to join them right away, but at the same time jealous of any interaction that might be going on between Enyu and his master. Finally Iason solved his dilemma for him by demanding that he return to the table and finish his breakfast.

Eyes down, Riki slunk to the table, wincing as he sat down. He was so shamed from his discipline in front of Enyu, he feared he might cry. Mortified, he stared at his plate, trying to regain control of his volatile emotions. He became aware that Iason had poured him some juice. When Riki continued to sit, motionless, Iason took hold of his hands, guiding him to his utensils. Then the Blondie bent over and whispered softly in his ear, "Be a good pet. Finish your breakfast. Remember what I promised you tonight." Under the table, Iason surreptitiously slid a hand across his thigh, caressing him suggestively.

Smiling, Riki resumed eating.

Enyu watched this exchange jealously. Riki's punishment hadn't changed the intimacy between the Blondie and the mongrel, which was a source of great mystification to him. If anything it seemed to have added a new dynamic to their relationship that day; he couldn't put his finger on it, but there was something almost erotic about what he had just witnessed—the master carting off his pet for punishment behind closed doors and then both of them returning to the table, pet sulking while his master fussed over him, then Iason whispering something pleasing enough to his pet to elicit a smile. It was almost...a game of some sort, and while Enyu was jealous, he was also intrigued. And now...aroused.

"Master Iason," Enyu said, softly.

"Yes?" The Blondie did not look at him, but continued eating.

"May I please go to my room?"

Enyu was desperate to relieve himself; the sight of Iason's bare chest beneath the Blondie's long hair was simply too much.

"You may." Again, no eye contact.

"His room? What does he mean, his room?" Riki demanded.

“I put him in the guest wing.”

“What! You opened the guest wing!” Now Riki leapt to his feet, excited to finally see the mysterious “guest wing” that had remained off limits since his arrival at the penthouse. The mongrel had tormented many a housekeeper in his fruitless attempts to gain access.

“Sit down,” Iason said sternly.

“But I’m finished!”

“Riki,” the Blondie warned.

Reluctantly, his pet sat down again, then began stuffing his face to clear his plate.

“Stop eating like an animal,” Iason chided.

Enyu rose and tried to leave the table unnoticed, hoping his immense erection would escape scrutiny.

No such luck.

Riki laughed, pointing. “Look at cat-boy’s hard-on!”

Everyone looked, much to Enyu’s mortification. He lowered his head. “I am sorry, Master Iason. I’m close to my interval.”

“When does it begin?” Iason asked, trying to keep his composure, although the sight of his new pet’s arousal sent a surge of carnal agitation to his loins.

“The new moon. Two days.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” Riki giggled.

“Enyu is Xeronian. They have a five-day rutting period.”

“Interval,” Enyu corrected softly.

Iason shot him a withering look, not caring to be corrected by his new pet. “What’s that?” he said sharply.

“We call it an interval, Master Iason. Forgive me, I spoke out of turn.”

Riki was beside himself with mirth at this discovery, laughing so hard he fell off his chair to the floor. “He ruts! Oh fuck! I’m gonna die! Cat-boy’s going into heat!”

Even Katze, who had been rather somber and withdrawn during breakfast, managed a smile.

“Riki,” Iason sighed.

Wiping tears from his eyes, Riki continued to suppress giggles that exploded from him despite his best efforts to regain his composure. "So he's off to his room to jerk off."

"Is that so?" Iason demanded.

"With your permission, Master Iason."

"You didn't ask his permission to jerk off before," Riki pointed out helpfully.

Now Enyu gritted his teeth and closed his eyes, feeling uncomfortably close to release.

"Oh god! He's gonna spill right here! He's gonna stain his pretty dress!"

Iason's eyes were drawn to Enyu's bulge, which was most definitely moving.

"May I go?" Enyu pleaded.

"Make him jerk off in front of us!" Riki suggested, excited. "That's what you made ME do. Make cat-boy masturbate!"

Heart pounding faster, Iason leaned over and whispered into Riki's ear. "Do you really want to see that?"

"Yeah," Riki whispered, delighting in the thought of the new pet being humiliated, the possibility that Enyu might enjoy providing such an exhibition never occurring to him.

The Blondie slid his hand between his legs, caressing him, then turned to look at Enyu.

"You'll relieve yourself here. Disrobe."

"As you wish, Master Iason," Enyu said, bowing to hide his smile, thrilled to have the opportunity to arouse his new master, although not particularly pleased to have the mongrel or the strange Furniture in the audience.

"Excuse me," Katze said, rising to clear the table. Had it been any other time, he would have enjoyed watching the Xeronian. But he couldn't now. It didn't seem right. Not without Daryl. Iason did not even acknowledge his departure, his eyes now locked on the young pet.

Enyu untied his robe and let it slide from his body. The sight of his beautiful masculine lines elicited admiration from both master

and pet, though rather reluctantly from Riki. With deliberate provocation, Enyu widened his stance, grasping his immense erection in his hands and thrusting into it suggestively, then pleasuring himself with long, sensual strokes, increasing in speed until he began pumping himself with unmistakable intent. With a seductive gaze, he directed his every move at the beautiful Blondie, who appeared to watch him impassively, his face expressionless.

In fact, Iason was tremendously aroused by Enyu, particularly his suggestive thrusting, and the smoldering lust in his eyes. He spread his legs apart, wanting to adjust himself but not wanting Riki to notice. Finally he could not resist, moving a hand to his developing erection.

The mongrel, in fact, was entranced with Enyu's performance, becoming aroused as well, without wanting to. Iason's hand movement immediately caught his attention, and he watched jealousy as his master began stroking himself.

This wasn't turning out as Riki had planned. Enyu didn't seem humiliated...and Iason was most definitely aroused. And now he was aroused, too...by stupid cat-boy.

Enyu closed his eyes and threw back his head, moaning, now pumping himself without restraint.

Riki hated that Iason seemed mesmerized by Enyu's performance, hated the way his thumb brushed across his silk pants as he fondled himself. There was only one thing he could do to get his attention. He scooted closer to his master and nuzzled up against him possessively.

Iason smiled down at his pet, amused by his obvious ploy to garner his attention. "What is it, pet? Are you jealous now?"

Riki's reply was to slide his hand down Iason's trousers.

Surprised, Iason moaned, thrilled when his pet began stroking him. "Good boy," he whispered in his ear. "I like that. You're such a good pet." Now distracted from Enyu, Iason began kissing Riki's throat.

The sight of master and pet loving one another sent Enyu over the edge. Through gritted teeth he groaned, sending semen shooting across the table. Iason did not even notice.

The Blondie suddenly pulled Riki onto his lap, kissing him furiously. "Riki," he moaned between kisses. "I love you so much."

"I...love you, too," Riki answered, cut off by Iason's passionate kisses, his tongue demanding entrance.

"Ohhh," Iason breathed brokenly, "I want you so terribly."

"Take me."

"But you...you'll be sore."

"Take me anyway."

Not needing further invitation, Iason stood up, carrying Riki to his bedroom. The mongrel wrapped his legs around his master's waist and looked over the Blondie's shoulder at Enyu, who regarded their departure with obvious disappointment. Smiling triumphantly at the Xeronian, Riki began nibbling Iason's throat, inciting the Blondie to pick up his pace.

Enyu was...angry. He had given a delicious performance—he was sure of it. But then Riki had to crawl on master's lap and ruin everything. Iason had not even acknowledged him when leaving the room. All he cared about was that stupid mongrel. He'd even told him he loved him, then started kissing him as if Enyu wasn't even there. As the master bedroom door hummed closed, Enyu released some of his pent up frustration by slamming his fist down on the table.

"You'll never come between them." Enyu turned to see Katze regarding him with obvious contempt. He was leaning back against the wall, arms crossed on his chest.

"Are you addressing me, Furniture? It's SIR Enyu."

"The name's Katze. Why don't you get off your high horse?"

"How dare you speak to me that way. I'll have master beat you."

"Go ahead. Tell Master Iason. But you'd better realize things in the household aren't like they are elsewhere. He's likely to pull out

his taming stick and give you a few hard whacks just for wasting his time with your pet nonsense. Iason isn't like other masters."

"So it appears," Enyu sniffed. "Just as Jupiter said."

"What's that?" Now Katze uncrossed his arms, walking toward him. "What did Jupiter say?"

Enyu turned his head, silent.

"I see. Listen up, cat-boy. I don't know what Jupiter had in mind sending you here, but I'm watching you. If you hurt Riki or Master Iason in any way, I'll fucking kill you. Got it?"

The Xeronian knelt to retrieve his robe, donning it with deliberate slowness as he feigned disinterest in the unveiled threat.

"And you can clean up your own smut juice," Katze said, throwing a rag onto the table. "I'm just here on temporary duty. In the future, I'd advise you know who you're talking to before you start doling out insults."

With that Katze turned on his heel and went out to the balcony to smoke.

Enyu stared after him with pure hatred, then looked at the rag, uncertain. Did the Furniture seriously expect him to clean up after himself? He had said he was here... temporarily. Then where was his regular attendant? Enyu stared at the rag for some moments, debating. Surely the Furniture would be punished for failing to do his duty...wouldn't he? But...what would his master do when he saw the mess hadn't been cleaned up? And why...had there been urine—and blood—on the floor the previous night? Had the Blondie beat his pet for making a mess?

Deciding to play it safe, Enyu wiped up his essence and then retreated to his room to brood.

As soon as Iason got Riki inside his bedroom, he lay him down on the bed, kissing him hungrily. He rolled onto his back, pulling his pet onto his tummy, and running his hands gently down his back.

Riki winced.

"I'm sorry, love."

The mongrel shook his head, as if dismissing his pain.

“I’ll get you another Opiate-6,” Iason promised.

“Okay,” his pet agreed quickly, smiling.

Iason tugged at his pants. “Take these off—no, everything.”

Riki obeyed, scowling a little as he pulled off his shirt. He removed his pants, then slid on top of Iason when the Blondie held out his hands to him.

“That’s good,” Iason whispered, enjoying the warmth of his pet on his own bare chest.

“You look so sexy with just these pants on,” Riki said, grinning.

“Come here,” the Blondie answered, pulling him close and devouring him with a long, exquisitely passionate kiss. He rolled Riki onto his back while continuing to kiss him. Then he stopped and looked down at him. “Riki. I want to tell you something.”

“What is it?” his pet said, solemnly. His master had never spoken to him in such a manner before.

“Last night...I was tempted to take Enyu. But I thought of you and...I didn’t. The reason I didn’t was because I love you. And I didn’t want to hurt you.”

Hurt and jealous from this revelation, Riki choked back tears that stung his eyes. “I knew it,” he whispered.

“Oh pet. Don’t be hurt. It is nothing but...a purely physical phenomenon. My heart belongs to you.” The Blondie stroked his cheek lovingly.

“Are you...going to take him?” The mongrel stared up at him, eyes wide and brimming with tears.

“No, love,” Iason promised. “I will not. Not if it hurts you.” Now he bent closer to nuzzle his cheek, and then whispered in his ear, “But I loved it when you wanted to watch him with me...and I loved...when you began touching me. I couldn’t wait to get you in here.”

Riki thought about this for a moment, feeling a little better about Iason’s confession, although the Blondie had misunderstood his intentions in wanting Enyu to masturbate for them. Surely it was better that Iason had been honest with him. And, in his heart,

Riki already knew that his master was attracted to his new pet. Iason began kissing his throat, and he closed his eyes, sighing.

Iason was now consumed with passion, moaning urgently as he covered Riki's flesh with tiny bites and kisses. He sucked on a nipple, eliciting a tortured gasp of pleasure, an erotic arching of his pet's back as he offered himself for more stimulation. After continuing for a few moments thus, Iason could wait no longer.

He rose up onto his knees, reaching over the bedside table for the vial of lubricating oil, then took Riki's hand with trembling fingers and poured a generous amount of oil in it.

Rising up onto one elbow, the mongrel dutifully prepared his master, his deliberately sensual touch bringing a smile to the Blondie's lips, who allowed him to stroke him for a few moments, shuddering.

"Lie back," he commanded.

Riki did so, and his master scooped up his legs in his arms, pushing them toward his shoulders to position him for entry. In an easy, experienced undulation, Iason penetrated, sliding uncompromisingly deep into his pet's snug passage. Riki whimpered, biting his lip.

"I'm sorry, love," Iason whispered, a shuddered breath escaping his lips. He tried to remain still for a moment to allow his pet some time to recover, but it was too hard to resist thrusting, and so he began his conquest, though with restrained, tentative movements.

"Go ahead," Riki reassured him, though he winced with every move.

"Riki." The Blondie whispered his name excitedly, urgently, feeling unable to restrain himself now that he had obtained his pet's blessing. Riki's legs brushed against his arms as he held himself up over the beautiful mongrel. Then, with a moan, the Blondie began an unfettered acquisition, plundering his pet without restraint, the hot, lubricated embrace offering deliciously sweet passage.

It was an incontrovertibly exquisite fuck.

Although Riki was in pain, he did not really mind, entranced with his master's obvious pleasure, Iason's expression intoxicatingly erotic, his eyes brimming with intense lust. The Blondie's soft hair brushed against his body as he took him, tickling him. And then, Riki saw a look he had been waiting for since he had first seen it elicited by Raoul—the curl of Iason's lip, an erotic sneer that ended with the Blondie biting his lip and closing his eyes.

Excited that he had finally produced “the look” he had sought for weeks, Riki felt a surge of blood rushing to his loins, his erection now throbbing and begging for attention. He began stroking himself, but was distracted when Iason suddenly withdrew, flipping him over onto his tummy and pulling his hips up and spreading his legs. Now on his knees, the Blondie pulled back on his hips as he gave him a hard fucking from behind, repositioned himself and his pet for the deepest penetration.

Riki gasped, now thoroughly enjoying being so forcibly taken by his Blondie master. He loved that, once Iason had obtained his acquiescence, he took him without hesitation or restraint, ignoring his whimpers and occasional cries. The mongrel found that he admired the Blondie for this; Iason was undeniably sexy when he was in full “master” guise and on such occasions Riki found that he enjoyed being “taken,” perhaps even crying out a bit more than he really needed to.

Iason was beside himself with pleasure, his head thrown back, eyes closed, lips parted. Now he began vocalizing his thrusts with a series of erotic, urgent gasps and moans. “Yes,” he whispered, pulling back firmly, almost angrily on his pet's hips to position him just where he wanted him. “Ohhh...Riki,” breathed, excitedly then, with a groan, reached his peak, ejaculating so hard that he cried out, startling Riki, who listened to his sex song with delight.

The Blondie felt certain that he had just experienced the best orgasm of his life. He pushed his pet to the bed and withdrew slowly, then just lay on top of him for a moment. Although the pressure on his back was uncomfortable, Riki waited patiently, wanting Iason to enjoy every residual pleasure.

“Riki. That was...perfect.” The Blondie rolled off him, onto his back. Riki moved onto his side, immediately stroking himself.

“I hope you’re ready to be fucked, cause I want you now,” Riki replied, with a saucy smile.

Iason smiled. “And what would you have me do, Master Riki?”

Thrilled with Iason’s appellation, though he knew it was in jest, Riki leapt up onto his knees, then pointed to his erection. “Lube me up.”

Smiling at the mongrel’s choice of words, the Blondie retrieved the vial and lubricated him well. Riki enjoyed this so much he began thrusting into his hand, then realized he would quickly spill his seed if he continued down that path.

“Turn over. On your tummy,” he commanded.

Iason obeyed, and Riki straddled him, pushing his legs together. With his fingers, he spread his cheeks apart to find his portal. Pressing his engorged cock up to the Blondie’s beautiful buttocks, he prodded between his cheeks until he felt reception, then proceeded to enter, sliding in fully. The fit was so tight, so beautiful, that Riki held his breath, afraid he would release right away.

Beneath him, the Blondie smiled, knowing full well why his pet hesitated. One of the things he had always found endearing about Riki was how easily he became aroused and how quickly he reached completion. What Iason didn’t know was that Riki had never exhibited this trait with anyone else but his beautiful Blondie master, who simply excited him beyond containment.

Now Riki began his hard-won fuck, relishing every thrust. Although his evening with Raoul had been nothing short of terrifying, Riki almost felt that it was worth it for seven days of fucking Iason. The Blondie felt so amazingly good. And then, when Iason began his special trick, squeezing and twitching him, his mongrel pet released a pathetic little whimper before ejaculating hard into the Blondie’s passage, far sooner than he meant to.

Iason tried not to laugh, but he found Riki so adorable, it was hard to resist. Biting his lip, he rolled onto his back and smiled up at his pet, who looked as if he were in a daze.

“Was that good, my pet?”

“Yeah...but it was over...too fast.”

“The day’s not over yet.”

“That’s true.” Riki smiled, then reached down to kiss him. “Will you get me an Opiate-6 now?”

“Yes, love.”

The lovers got up then and dressed. Riki was ready first, and immediately headed out to the balcony for a smoke. He found Katze there, getting ready to light up, and they smiled knowingly at one another.

“Sounded fun,” Katze remarked.

“It was.” Riki offered him a Dark Baccalias, and Katze accepted, putting his own smoke back for later.

“Yeah?”

“I’ll tell you about it sometime,” Riki said, in a low voice.

Katze nodded, lighting up. Riki did the same, and for some moments they didn’t speak, both of them thinking the same thing.

“Have you heard anything?”

“I called this morning. He’s stable.”

“That’s good,” Riki said, smiling. “Are you going to see him today?”

“Assuming Iason says yes.”

“He will. I’d like to go, too...sometime, that is. I’m sure right now you’re the only one Daryl really wants to see.”

Katze nodded, smiling.

“It’s fun having you here, anyway. Especially with cat-boy around.”

Katze laughed. “I can’t believe you wanted him to jerk off.”

“Yeah, well.” Riki took a long drag, looking down.

After a pause, Katze said, without looking at him, “Watch out for him, Riki.”

“I know.”

They smoked together in silence, and then Riki tossed his butt over the ledge. “Well, I’m off to check out cat-boy’s room.”

Katze gave him a half-hearted salute as a send off, winking.

Riki sauntered into the penthouse, immediately heading for the guest wing. He couldn't believe Iason had finally opened the wing, after two years of Riki's begging to see it. Why had the Blondie kept the wing sealed all that time? As he approached the wing and the door—for the first time—hummed open, Riki stopped in his tracks, stunned. How many rooms were there? The mongrel counted. Eleven. Eleven rooms he had never seen before! But the door at the end of the hall drew his attention; it seemed different than the others, larger, and as he approached it and it slid open, he could hardly believe his eyes.

An immense, curving swimming pool—empty, at present—in a room covered with skylights. Huge pots and planters littered the room, and Riki guessed they had once housed plants of various kinds. He looked down at the tile on the floor, which was exquisitely detailed and colorful. There was a glass door at one end of the long room, and Riki made for it, opening it to find it led to another balcony, much larger than the one off the great hall, and in it was a second pool. There were several large statues, and upon closer examination Riki realized they were fountains run dry.

The mongrel was excited by his discovery, although he was confused why Iason had not let him see the wing. It was just like the hidden observatory, kept from him for no apparent reason; how many secrets were still undiscovered in Iason's penthouse? Perhaps his master had worried that Riki would pester him to fill the pools—which he certainly now intended to do.

Riki went back inside to the corridor, determined to find Enyu's room. As it happened, the Xeronian was just coming out of his room when Riki approached.

Without ceremony, the mongrel entered Enyu's suite, brushing past him without a word.

"What are you doing?" Enyu demanded.

Riki stopped cold when he saw the pet's accommodations. "What the fuck?" he cried, eyeing the kitchenette, bar and private bathroom jealously, his eyes next resting on the holographic projector.

“Get out of my room.”

The mongrel ignored him, flipping on the projector, a life-size holographic image of two pets copulating suddenly appearing before him. He put his hand into the projection to distort the image. “Not fair,” he said, softly, hurt that Iason would have given this new pet such luxurious accommodations. As he recollected Iason’s confession about wanting to take Enyu the previous night, he became incensed, wondering if his Blondie master had been tempted when showing the Xeronian to his new room.

“I said, get out!”

“Fuck you!”

“Filthy mongrel,” Enyu spat, contemptuously.

“That’s it, cat-boy.” Now Riki lunged for him, managing to knock him down and get a few good punches in before he was lifted roughly by his shirt, and set firmly back on the ground by Iason.

“Stop it this instant,” Iason said, sternly.

“He...attacked me,” Enyu whimpered, his lip bleeding.

Riki did not try to deny the assertion, but instead confronted Iason. “How come HE gets this room?”

“Stop making a fuss,” Iason whispered, sternly. He fully intended to rectify the situation with the rooms if Riki would only calm down.

“But it’s not fair!”

“Riki, did you hear me?”

“Fuck you, Iason. You’re an asshole,” Riki snapped, giving him a little push, too pissed to care about the consequences.

A smile curled onto Enyu’s lips at these fatal words, shocked that the mongrel had actually dared assault his master, and he watched with delight as Iason grabbed his pet above the elbow, yanking him toward the door.

“That’s it, pet. You’re really in for it now.”

The Blondie dragged off a furious Riki, who struggled futilely against his equally angry master.

Enyu followed them quietly, smiling.

After His Breakfast Spanking

Without another word, Iason escorted his pet from Enyu's room, making for the great hall. Suddenly Riki, in an attempt to escape certain punishment, wriggled out of his master's grasp, dashing down the hall toward the pool area. Iason sprinted after him, catching him with ease and slamming him up against the wall. Pinning his pet's arms to the wall, Iason bent close to him, for a moment distracted by his pet's intoxicating scent. He suddenly wanted to taste his pet's mouth, explore him thoroughly with his tongue.

"Did you really think you could escape punishment, pet?" he whispered. "There's no place you can hide where I won't find you. You've just doubled your punishment."

His pet stared back defiantly, trying to hide his crumbling resolve.

Gripping him painfully above the elbow, the towering Blondie led his unruly charge into the great hall, heading with resolute firmness toward his chair. The mongrel's words echoed in his head, infuriating him. Only Riki would dare speak to him that way, so openly defiant of his authority in front of his new pet. He was hurt that Riki had turned on him so viciously when they had just loved so sweetly in his bed.

Riki was getting a sound spanking; there was nothing he could do or say to prevent it.

On perceiving his master's intent, Riki now began struggling furiously against him, his efforts failing to even slow the Blondie's pace.

"You never gave me that Opiate-6!" he pointed out, panicked.

"You should have thought of that before," came the Blondie's curt, uncompromising reply.

"But...I've just been tortured practically to death...I'm not healed enough yet." Riki purred at his master with cunning sweetness, gazing up at him with wide, martyred eyes.

"I warned you this morning, pet. If you wanted to save your behind from a sound spanking, you should have modified your behavior accordingly."

"This is so...fucking unfair! You're treating him like a freaking prince! And he...he was being a total asshole, all perched so high!"

"That's no excuse, Riki."

Reaching his chair, Iason sat down, pulling his naughty pet roughly over his knee and pinning his arms firmly to his back with one hand.

"Please, Iason," the mongrel begged. "I didn't mean what I said."

"But you said it all the same, didn't you?" the Blondie whispered, harshly, tugging down his pants to his thighs, just above his knees. He felt particularly annoyed with Riki's impudence because it had taken place in front of his new pet, and for that, he would make Riki suffer.

He was still badly bruised, but the molecular accelerator had continued to work its astonishing magic—at this point his injuries had healed considerably, now at least half as severe as the previous day. Iason examined him with amazement; it was no wonder the accelerator was sold at the pavilion with the paddles and whips, the perfect solution for masters who enjoyed punishing their pets more frequently than nature alone would have allowed.

Originally developed for hospital usage to decrease medical costs and then seized by the military Elite, its microtechnology had rapidly found its way onto the market and now was one of the most

asked for items on the shelf, according to Yousi. Its popularity was due not only to its healing properties but also its agonizing sting, which was sometimes worse than the punishment itself. The accelerator could not completely heal a deep branding, however, and the initials burned into his pet's flesh were destined to become scars, which Iason found exceedingly irksome. He needed to do something about it, and soon.

"Don't let him watch," Riki pleaded, mortified that Enyu had followed them into the hall, and now witnessed him so humiliatingly positioned over his master's knee, an exultant sneer on his face.

Iason then noticed Enyu, and for a moment contemplated whether he should allow the pet to stay or send him to his room.

"He would do well to watch," he said finally, giving Enyu a pointed look, "as well as wipe that smirk off his face, because this is what happens to naughty pets. That or a good taming, whipping, or paddling. Isn't that right, Riki?"

The mongrel sighed, bracing himself for a nasty stretch of punishment. Iason's comment had pacified him somewhat and had inspired a new project—provoking Enyu into misbehaving in some manner worthy of hardcore punishment. He fervently hoped Enyu would be unable to tame his smile so he would get a taste of Iason's wicked arm.

Enyu, far from being frightened by his master's threat—having never been physically disciplined before in his life and confident that he would never incur displeasure enough to warrant it—was aroused by the entire situation, and ached to fondle himself and celebrate the unfolding scene more fully. However, he obediently adopted a more somber, chastised demeanor, artfully concealing his delight.

Iason was letting Riki squirm, something he knew his pet hated. Riki could feel the Blondie's hair brushing against his exposed skin, the cool air teasing his bare flesh, his master's warm hand resting possessively on his thigh, and it was almost erotic, except that he knew what was coming—and it wouldn't be pleasant. He also knew

that no matter what he said at this point, he couldn't get out of being disciplined, which made waiting for the punishment to commence nothing short of agonizing.

After several excruciatingly long moments, and once Riki's heart had really started to pound, the Blondie addressed him in a low, menacing voice.

"You...are...NEVER...to address me or physically provoke me in such a disrespectful manner again. Is that quite clear, pet?"

"Yeah."

"What's that?" he said, sharply.

"Yes?"

"Yes what?"

"Yes...Master," Riki said through gritted teeth.

"I've given you a little reprieve on my earlier warning, Riki, but henceforth, in the company of others, you will address me as Master or receive three strikes with the taming stick. Understood?"

"You mean every fucking sentence or what?"

With that, Iason whipped out his taming stick, and without further comment gave his pet three sharp strikes to his thighs, much to his pet's anguished dismay.

He slid the taming stick back in its sheath. "I said, IS THAT UNDERSTOOD?"

"Yes...MASTER IASON." Riki was unable to resist a tone of voice that was dangerously close to being disrespectful.

"Ohhh," Iason laughed brokenly, brushing his fingers tantalizingly down Riki's buttocks to his thighs, then back again, then resting his hand threateningly on his pet's bare ass. "That was most unwise, don't you think, pet? Have you lost all awareness of where you are, bent over my knee with your pants down to your knees? And your strategy is to provoke me when I'm about to discipline you?" He illustrated his point with a preliminary spank, a smart stinging smack to warn his pet as to what was coming.

"I said Master Iason!" Riki protested.

"Three strikes, Riki."

"I mean I said Master Iason, Master!" Riki tried, desperately.

“Too late, pet.” Iason whipped out his taming stick again, punishing his pet with three smarting strikes to his thighs. Riki responded to this with a howl of pain that ended in a single word.

“Fuck.”

The word was whispered so miserably that Iason smiled, slamming his taming stick in its sheath. “I’m not going to count that, as I’m assuming your remark was not intended as dialogue.”

Enyu gloated over Riki’s castigation, although he wondered about the Blondie’s qualified command “in the company of others.” Did this mean the unruly pet enjoyed special privileges when alone with his master? The sight of Riki so humiliatingly exposed and his master’s unhurried approach to discipline was unquestionably erotic, and he was now almost panting, his sex organ painfully inflamed. He held his hands behind his back, clasped together, desperately wanting to pleasure himself but knowing it was not the time to bother Master Iason with his request.

The unmistakable sound of punishment had lured Katze into the hall, and he stood, wiping his hands with a towel, shaking his head in disbelief. How had Riki managed to get punished so soon after his breakfast spanking, and not a day after he had been violated by Raoul? Didn’t the mongrel know how to milk a dramatic situation like Raoul’s abduction? Riki could have enjoyed extensive coddling and special attention from Iason, who had been completely distraught over his pet’s disappearance. Instead, here he was, vulnerably positioned for punishment, warmed up by a taming stick, and in for what promised to be, by Iason’s deliberate slowness in commencing, a serious spanking. Not like his breakfast spanking—an old-fashioned, bare hand to bare bottom over the knee hard spanking. Only Riki could have managed that.

“Just...get on with it already,” Riki sighed, then added in a defeated tone, “Master.”

“I’ll get on with it when I’m good and ready. But as it happens I’m quite anxious to get on with it, which is actually rather unfortunate for you. I warned you this morning not to misbehave, did I not? I told you this is where you’d end up, and I told you a

good hard spanking waited for you here. You chose disobedience. Now, you're going to pay for it, my naughty little pet."

With that the Blondie gave his pet a hard spank on his bare and bruised bottom, an impressive smack that seemed inordinately loud in the great hall.

"Ow!" Riki howled, still burning from the taming stick.

Another smarting spank, this time harder, eliciting another cry of anguish from his pet.

Spank!

The mongrel yelped, squirming.

Spank!

Spank!

With every strike, Riki voiced his agony, becoming increasingly distressed.

Spank!

Spank!

"Please stop, Master," the mongrel begged, whimpering.

"No, pet. We've only started." Iason was a little amused that his pet was already begging for mercy.

Spank!

"Master Iason!"

Spank!

"Oh fuck!"

Spank!

"Not feeling so rebellious now, I think?" Iason queried, sternly. "Perhaps...now you regret your insolent conduct toward me?"

Spank!

Riki cried out in anguish.

Spank!

"HOW MANY TIMES must I teach you that I AM YOUR MASTER, Riki?" Iason's voice was frighteningly harsh, thick with anger.

As always, the sudden change in his master's manner and tone of voice terrorized his pet; Riki hated it when Iason showed his anger, finding the fearsome Blondie nothing less than terrifying.

Spank!

Yelping, Riki instinctively squirmed in a futile effort to escape his master's hand.

Spank!

"How DARE you speak to me in such a manner, pet! You're paying for it now, aren't you? AREN'T YOU?"

Spank!

"Stop! It fucking hurts!"

Spank!

"Three more strikes with the taming stick, Riki. When I'm finished. And of course it hurts...that's the whole point." As if to emphasize this, Iason spanked his pet a little harder, just enough for Riki to know the punishment could get even worse. The Blondie had been exercising considerable restraint, feeling that a hard smack was sufficient punishment on Riki's tormented flesh. But now he longed to put the force of his frustration behind his arm, and he struggled to rein in his dark wrath.

Spank!

"How does this feel now? Can you tell how angry I am with you?"

Wailing, Riki kicked desperately, managing to kick Iason a few times, though not deliberately.

Spank!

"Stop kicking, or I'll have Enyu come over and hold your legs down."

Enyu smiled at this, delighted.

The mongrel's legs immediately went limp.

Spank!

"This is far from being over, pet. Feeling some regret, perhaps?" Iason was beginning to truly enjoy the experience, savoring his pet's every cry, squirm, and plea-bargain, and the erotic sight of him so deliciously exposed and delightfully castigated over his knee. He was now exceedingly aroused, half tempted to throw his pet onto the floor and take him.

Spank!

“Please Ma..Master...pleeaasse stop,” Riki pleaded, now in tears. Iason’s threat that the punishment was “far from being over” chilled him; he was desperate for the pain to end...and he was frightened.

Spank!

“Not yet, pet.” This was spoken softly, the Blondie softening now that he had broken his pet. But he would not stop just yet; his pet needed more correction, needed to know that he was completely in his master’s control, needed to sob until his nose ran, needed to learn to fear his hand. That Riki had not learned this yet was mystifying, but Iason knew it meant he would simply have to punish him more severely until he did.

Spank!

He continued spanking in a rhythmic, methodical fashion, each hard spank to the pet’s bare bottom announced with a loud smack; Riki’s cries had escalated from isolated whimpers and yelps to a continuous wail of torment, punctuated with sobs. He was now moving into the critical final stage of the punishment, the place where obedience was driven home.

This was how he was finally going to tame Riki. As many times over his knee, or bent over a table, or pushed up against a wall as it took for his pet to tremble at the mere sight of his ungloved hand.

Spank!

Spank!

Spank!

With each strike, the Blondie elicited a wail from his punished pet that ended in a pathetic little sob. He felt he was very close to achieving correction; just a bit more pain, a few more tears, and he would stop. He was so aroused from the sound of Riki’s cries that he wondered if he would stain his trousers.

Spank!

Spank!

Spank!

Spank!

Riki was now screaming in utter misery.

Spank!!
Spank!!
Spank!!
Spank!!!!

The last four strikes were, cruelly, the hardest of them all; Iason intended to leave an impression and so struck him with the full force of his arm for an excruciating conclusion, the final spank impossibly brutal.

Hand burning from the spanking, and a thoroughly corrected pet wailing miserably on his lap, the Blondie finally stopped, then slid his taming stick from its sheath, a menacing hiss that elicited a shudder of fear from his pet.

“Three strikes, Riki,” he warned, pressing the cold taming stick against his thighs. He delivered the promised encore punishment, sending his pet over the edge. Riki sobbed inconsolably, and Iason just let him lie bent over his knees for quite some time to cry out his pain and frustration, once again returning his taming stick to its sheath.

Had anyone counted, and Enyu certainly did, the Blondie master delivered a total of 33 stinging smacks to the naughty pet. It was a much longer, more excruciating spanking than Riki had expected, given his compromised state. Iason knew that with a new pet watching, he had to come down hard on Riki’s unacceptable behavior. Although he sensed that Enyu was not rebellious, he was going to be sure this pet was tamed properly from the start, but to do that he needed to address Riki’s more egregious lapses in pet etiquette.

Enyu, after witnessing Riki’s punishment at the hands of his beautiful Blondie master, was biting his lip in sexual torment. Iason now considered the handsome youth, who was clearly once again in desperate need of release. Intrigued, he watched him obediently wait for his command, hands behind his back, despite his obvious distress. He nodded his approval. Perhaps Riki could learn something from this new pet.

“Relieve yourself, Enyu,” he ordered.

“Here, Master Iason?” Enyu asked hopefully.

“Yes.”

With shaking fingers, the young pet quickly disrobed, this time less interested in performing. He simply wanted to come.

Groaning as he touched his engorged member, Enyu began pumping himself without restraint, emitting a series of grunts and moans that escalated quickly into a hypnotic, rhythmic sex cry.

Riki had quieted, and now regarded his rival pet with unabashed fascination. There was something inexplicably compelling about Enyu when he was aroused that intrigued both master and pet. He almost became more animal than man, the embodiment of sexuality at its most primal form. Although the mongrel hated that he was attracted to him, he could not deny that at that precise moment, and despite the discipline he had just endured, he was.

Iason was similarly appreciative of Enyu’s performance and less puzzled than his pet over his own attraction to him; he guessed the Xeronian was emitting some sort of pheromone that grew in strength as he approached his rut. This would certainly explain why he found Enyu almost irresistible the night before, and why today he had been flooded with prurient thoughts whenever the Xeronian was near, even when he avoided looking at him. He could only imagine what the next few days would bring when the pet reached his interval.

At the present moment, Iason was especially overcome with libidinous impulses. Between his newly- spanked pet still bent over his knee, exposed for his viewing pleasure, and Enyu’s masturbation, Iason had developed a rock-hard erection. When he felt the stirring of Riki’s arousal against his thighs, he was suddenly seized with a wild desire to see Riki and Enyu do what pets were meant to do together—copulate.

With a loud, extraordinarily erotic cry, Enyu climaxed, his semen arcing to the floor. Riki shivered, a movement that was not lost on his master. Iason stood his pet back up on his feet, his erection now in plain view. Though Enyu had just ejaculated, he

regarded the mongrel's state with curiosity and surprise, while Katze discretely offered him a badly-needed damp cloth to wipe off his face.

"Now pets. You will perform for me. Riki. Undress and copulate with Enyu."

The look of utter surprise on both pets' faces was priceless, and the Blondie enjoyed their discomfiture.

"Did you hear me?" He said sharply. "Undress, Riki."

Riki hesitated for a moment, then looked at Enyu, stroking himself all the while. He didn't understand why, but he wanted to obey Iason. He...really...wanted to fuck Enyu...almost as though he were under some sort of spell. With hypnotic languor, he slowly doffed his pants, which had only been partly on anyway, then pulled off his shirt, tossing it aside as he approached the Xeronian.

Enyu would have preferred being the one taking the reins, but he was thrilled that his master once again wanted him to perform. He turned to him questioningly, waiting for further instruction.

"Bend over the table," the Blondie ordered. "The far end closest to me."

Enyu obeyed, resting his torso and hands on the table.

"Spread your legs more," Iason whispered.

The pet complied by spreading his legs wide, arching his back as he offered himself obediently for conquest, looking back at Riki with a deliberately seductive gaze. His Blondie master shivered with lust at the view, his hand instinctively moving to his erection.

Riki swallowed hard at the sight of the beautiful youth so enticingly positioned, begging to be fucked, at that moment nearly oblivious to their rivalry and his former prejudice against Enyu. He hesitated, looking at Iason for confirmation.

His master was watching him, fascinated. The look of pure lust in Iason's eyes was undeniable. He had unfastened his trousers and now pleased himself with sensual, languid strokes. "Go ahead, Riki," he said, softly.

Despite wanting to obey Iason, Riki continued to hesitate, just standing a few feet away from Enyu, nervously fondling himself. He

had never been asked to pair with another pet before, and for it to be cat-boy was simply a step he was not quite ready to make.

“Obey me, Riki,” Iason commanded, turning to Katze for assistance. “Katze?”

Katze immediately stepped forward, giving Riki a little push. “Do what Master Iason says,” he barked. “Didn’t that spanking teach you anything?”

Surprised to be reprimanded by Katze, the mongrel instinctively smiled, his mirth evaporating when the auburn-haired youth answered him with a hard, stinging slap to his face. Now Katze stood, legs wide apart, muscular arms crossed on his chest. “Didn’t you hear me?” he said, loudly, then grabbed hold of Riki’s hair, pushing him toward Enyu. “You will obey Master’s command, and you will do it NOW!”

Riki had never seen Katze with this face on before, and he hardly knew what to think of it. All he knew was that his slap had really...really...hurt.

He was now trembling, his heart beating fast, face stinging from Katze’s castigation, his backside still smarting like hell from Iason’s dark discipline. Yet he felt...exceptionally erotic. Strangely so. And he felt like fucking Enyu hard, making the little brat scream. Unbelievably, that was apparently what Iason wanted him to do. He stepped forward, spreading Enyu’s cheeks to locate his entrance, then without further preparation penetrated him fully with an angry thrust as hard and fast as he could.

The Xeronian was impossibly tight and hot, gripping him deliciously. Enyu cried out, which only fueled Riki’s concupiscence. Grabbing hold of his hips, he began his merciless pillage, impelled now by lust as well as revenge, reveling in the young pet’s whimpers and cries.

Iason watched his pets with complete mesmerization, relishing Riki’s roughness with the virgin pet and marveling over his control. The Blondie was now convinced that Enyu had not been taken by his previous master. He was simply too tight to be anything other than a virgin, his cries the unmistakable cries of a pet plundered for

the first time. Iason rarely saw this side of his mongrel pet, and he was enjoying watching him take Enyu so violently.

Enyu had, in fact, been taken many times, but Xeronian physiology was such that penetration was always difficult, the fit always remarkably tight, resisting entry. It was thus impossible for a Xeronian to be broken in. He resented Riki for being so needlessly rough, feeling that he might have enjoyed the sex if the mongrel hadn't been so bent on punishing him. But he could see that Master Iason was enjoying their coitus, and he really had no choice but to take it.

Riki found that he had complete command of himself when taking Enyu, unlike his tendency to rush to completion with his Blondie master. It reminded him of his days as the leader of Bison, where there had always been someone new for him to break in...and he always liked breaking them in hard, with punishing force...at least until he met Guy. It felt good to be in control again...extremely so. Riki only wished he could take Iason so forcefully, not only for his pleasure but to garner his respect. He widened his stance and pulled up on the pet's smooth hips to achieve deeper penetration, sneering at Enyu's voiced objection to his more demanding position. "Shut up and take it, ya little brat," he hissed, giving Enyu a good hard slap on his rump.

Iason chuckled at Riki's domineering manner, enjoying also the protests and whimpers from Enyu. He was now quite impressed with his pet's endurance. So. Riki's inability to last more than a few minutes was not a universal phenomenon among his pairing partners. It pleased Iason exceedingly to know that he possessed such power over his pet, that the virile, commanding mongrel he saw now trembled so easily at his slightest touch.

Riki turned to look at his master, and the sight of him so beautifully seated in his chair, legs spread widely and comfortably apart as he stroked himself openly, sensually, lust-filled eyes locked on his face, was the deciding factor in Riki's ascent. Closing his eyes and letting his head drop back, he climaxed with quiet intensity,

gasping softly with each wave of pleasure that broke forth from his loins. He withdrew, shuddering.

“Come here, pet.” His master’s voice was now seductively soft and inviting, his harsh, disciplinarian tone cast aside.

Knowing that by “pet” Iason referred to him, and not Enyu, Riki approached his master proudly. He was greeted with a pleased smile from the Blondie, who had summoned him for release.

“Sit on my lap,” he whispered, patting his thighs.

Riki did so, wincing. Iason solicited a long, sensual kiss from him, guiding his pet’s hand to his immense erection. He broke away, then whispered into his ear, “that was very good, pet. I liked watching you.”

“Master Iason,” Riki whispered, “do you still love me?”

Iason smiled. “Of course I do, Riki. Just because I had to punish you doesn’t mean my feelings have changed. I am trying to correct you for your own good. And I know I am at fault; I have coddled you and failed to train you as I should; this was a dangerous omission on my part and I am afraid you are not going to enjoy the taming that’s ahead. My advice to you is to obey me fully, otherwise I will have to punish you again, and it will be harder next time, and harder still the time after that. We have a new pet in the household, and a new Furniture coming. So when you disobey me or misbehave, I will be forced to correct you with a strong arm, because they will be watching to see what the consequences of disobedience will be.”

Now the Blonde pulled him closer, whispering into his ear. “But when we are alone, it will be as it has always been, my love. You and I must walk in two worlds; the one that others see, and the world of our own making. In the world of the others there are...certain things expected of both of us as master and pet. Surely you know this; you know the consequences of your actions, yet you persist in your naughtiness, forcing me to punish you.”

Now he paused, breathing into his ear, sending chills through the mongrel. “If you could only behave, pet, I would never have to punish you again, and it would be only pleasure, then, between us.”

“I thought you liked punishing me, Master,” came the mongrel’s saucy reply.

Iason laughed softly. “True; I would still have to punish you every now and then, just for my own pleasure—and yours. Or have you forgotten that you enjoy it, too, my deviant one? Now, my pretty little pet, I want you to pleasure me. Get on your knees.”

Enyu watched this exchange jealously, fuming. Once again he felt he had gotten the raw end of the deal. At least his ass felt raw, and what had he gotten out of it? His master had summoned his “pet” to him for special services. Why didn’t Master Iason want him? When he saw Riki kneel before the handsome Blondie, he couldn’t contain himself.

“Master Iason,” he said, boldly, “would you like me to come to you also?”

“If had wanted you to do so, I would have told you, Enyu,” Iason replied without even looking up. His manner produced opposite reactions in his two listening pets; Enyu felt chastised by his master, Riki vindicated.

Smiling up at Iason, he proceeded to pleasure his master as sweetly and lovingly as he could, both because he wanted to please Iason and because he knew Enyu was watching. Riki’s deliberately tantalizing lingual arts and his gentle, insistent sucking had their intended effect on his Blondie master—Iason let out a breathy moan, running his hand through his pet’s dark hair. “Good boy...that’s it...what a good pet you are now.”

Riki welcomed these praises eagerly, his bottom still smarting wickedly from Iason’s spanking, his thighs on fire from the taming stick. He was determined to avoid the stick again that day, and practiced in his mind affixing “Master” to his comments, a mandate that he knew would be very difficult for him to remember. It seemed inexplicable to him that his master suddenly, after over two years, insisted on being addressed thus, when he had not issued this edict before. But Iason would have his way—of that much, he was sure; the taming stick hurt like bloody hell.

“Yess,” the Blondie sighed, spreading his legs a little wider as Riki wiggled his tongue erotically against his shaft, taking him a little deeper into his mouth. “Just like that, pet.”

Savoring Iason’s every gasp and sigh, and the way he ran his hands through his hair with intoxicating urgency, Riki gave his Blondie master a mongrel-style, down and dirty blow job that had him moaning in minutes.

“Riki,” Iason groaned, closing his eyes. With that the beautiful Blondie climaxed, hands resting gently on his pet’s head, his body trembling as his loins expelled his essence in magnificent bursts of rapture. He looked down at Riki, his face contorted with pleasure. “Yes, my darling pet,” he whispered, his voice husky and thick with sex, “swallow every drop, love.”

This entire scene was watched in wonderment by Enyu and Katze, both of whom were waiting to be dismissed, but it was as though Iason did not even know they were there. Enyu was madly jealous, and annoyingly aroused. Katze was simply curious, enjoying a perverted thrill watching Riki suck off the powerful Iason Mink, and recalling, with some mixed emotions, his own turn with the beautiful Blondie, as well as with Riki.

When Iason continued to ignore them, pulling his pet back onto his lap and whispering into his ear, then nuzzling against him, Katze nudged Enyu’s elbow. “Go to your room,” he whispered. Although Enyu didn’t care to be taking orders from his attendant, he was anxious to go, and he was also a little afraid of Katze after seeing him strike Riki. Both crept off, leaving master and pet to enjoy their intimate moment alone.

* * *

Raoul had never felt so humiliated in his life. He lay on his tummy as Yui administered first aid, not wanting his Furniture to see him so shamefully humbled, his body ripped with the unmistakable marks of discipline. But Yui’s quiet manner was

comforting, and the Blondie noticed how tenderly he dressed his wounds, seeking to cause him as little pain as possible.

Yui was impressed with his master's unflinching stoicism, how he quietly endured what must have been excruciating from the look of his wounds, particularly the lash marks. He couldn't get his mind around what had happened between his master, Iason and Riki, though he knew better than to ask. One thing he was sure of—this was no lovers' game; his master seemed beaten, defeated, his wounds deeper than those he nursed on his torn and bruised flesh. And the initials burned so savagely onto his skin could only belong to Iason Mink. Yui felt angry at the powerful Blondie for his callous, brutal treatment of his master, wishing he were in a position to do something about it, to take some revenge. Such thoughts of vengeance were atypical for the gentle youth, who was peaceful by nature, but his feelings for his Blondie Master were strong, and the grievance done to him, in his view, unconscionable.

Once all his wounds were tended, Raoul directed him to apply accelerator.

"Yui," he began, then fell silent. He was worried that he would lose his composure, that he would cry out in pain, which he did not want Yui to witness.

"It will be quite painful, Master Raoul," Yui said, quickly, perceiving the cause for his master's sudden distress, "It's said that Commander Kattahar, after the midnight uprising on Arman, insisted his wounds be accelerated, but screamed so loudly Lieutenant Tung knocked over the lantern and set the tent on fire."

Smiling at Yui's story, and grateful for his diplomacy, Raoul steeled himself, then nodded. "Go ahead."

The pain was, in fact, so unbearable that the great Blondie screamed through gritted teeth, his eyes rolling back in agony. When Yui had almost finished, Raoul instinctively grabbed his arm, forcing him to drop the accelerator, then pushed him violently to the ground.

Surprised, but not really hurt, Yui remained calm, understanding that his master had not acted against him, but against the pain.

The Blondie immediately regretted his actions, feeling exceedingly foolish. He held out a hand to Yui. "I...didn't mean to hurt you," he offered, tersely.

Yui took his master's hand, smiling when the Blondie yanked him easily to his feet. "I wasn't hurt. Can I...get you anything, Master?"

"Mmm?" Raoul closed his eyes, sighing. The opiate Yui had given him was starting to kick in, and he was feeling sleepy.

"If you...can roll over onto your side, I could change the sheets," Yui offered, eyeing the bloodstained linens with a shiver.

Raoul answered by shifting onto his side. Yui rushed to attend to this task, then helped his Master get comfortable, freshening up his face with a damp cloth and brushing out his long, beautiful blonde hair, then stroking his temples in the soothing way a parent cajoles a child to sleep. As he moved to leave, Raoul reached out and seized his hand.

"Stay," he commanded, comforted by the beautiful boy's presence and by his gentle touch. He couldn't ask Yui for what he wanted, but he hoped he would somehow discern it from his actions.

Yui's heart beat a little faster as his master continued to hold his hand. He reached out with his other hand and continued caressing his master's brow, which was exactly what Raoul wanted. He sighed, contented, and was lulled into a restful slumber.

* * *

Iason pulled on his gloves, turning to Katze.

"I have a few matters that need attending. I'm leaving you in charge." He removed the taming belt and sheath, handing it to him. "Don't hesitate to use this if necessary."

"No problem." Katze put on the belt, fastening it tight, the taming stick brushing against his outer thigh. "Iason. About Enyu."

“Yes?”

“He said something to me earlier this morning. It was a little vague, but he seemed to be saying that Jupiter told him you...were a deviant.”

Iason considered this for a moment. “Impossible. Jupiter doesn’t talk to pets.”

“Don’t you find it odd, though, that Enyu was sent from Jupiter?”

The Blondie did find it odd, for many reasons, and had been puzzling over the gift since he acquired Enyu at the Dark Horse. He nodded. “I’m watching him.”

“Another thing. This morning I did some research on Xeronians. This interval that’s almost upon us—this is a powerful thing. When he ruts, he emits pheromones, but at a hundred times the Amoian levels. Right now he’s all obedience, but then he’ll be an animal. He’ll have to be chained up for the duration. But you—and Riki—will both be drawn to him. I just thought...you should know.”

“I thought as much,” Iason replied. “That explains a few things. I think we’ll wait until after his rut to take him to the tailor.”

“That might be wise,” Katze agreed, smiling. “He seems a little...excited.”

“Oh—Katze. One more thing. I want accelerator applied to Riki’s wounds. Use the entire contents.”

“Sure thing.”

“He won’t like it,” Iason warned. “You might have to tie him down.”

“I will if I need to.”

“Also, please contact Xian Sami; tell him I’d liked to have Juthian as soon as he’s ready to part with him. I want to start training him right away. He knows Daryl, so if he asks about him, say that he is in the hospital with a kidney infection, but try not to give much information.”

Katze nodded.

“You’ll be training him, Katze, for now. He’s going to be replacing Daryl.”

This was news to Katze, who hadn't spoken to Daryl—except briefly as he lay bleeding on the floor—since Iason had informed Daryl of his decision.

“What...what's going to happen to Daryl?” he asked, alarmed.

“I've decided his skills would be better used elsewhere. I have several projects in mind,” he answered, evasively.

“Then—he'll not be your Furniture anymore?”

“Once Juthian's trained, no. Just as it was with you. I'll find him a place in the city...unless you care to let him room with you.”

Heart pounding, Katze stared at the Blondie in disbelief. It was as though he had just given them both an extraordinary gift; he was speechless.

“I take it that plan meets with your approval?” the Blondie said softly, with a little smile.

“Yes,” he whispered, feeling his eyes sting with tears.

“Don't think I haven't forgotten we have some unfinished business to attend to. However, I've decided to suspend Daryl's punishment because of his commendable conduct in trying to defend Riki. I think the injuries he sustained are punishment enough. But you and I have this...issue between us that needs resolving.”

“Punish me tonight,” Katze pleaded.

“Why so eager?”

“Because...I don't want Daryl to watch me suffer.”

The Blondie nodded; he had wanted that to be part of the punishment, but given Daryl's condition, he would grant Katze his wish. “Very well.”

“Iason. May I visit Daryl first?”

“You may. After I return. You'll be punished on your return.”

“Thank you, Iason.” Katze was relieved that the Blondie was going to let him visit Daryl, who he was desperate to see.

“You won't be thanking me tonight. I'm afraid, given your infraction, your punishment must be severe.”

“I know.”

“I'm going to be whipping you, Katze.”

The beautiful redhead swallowed hard at this revelation, nodding solemnly. This wasn't the first time he would feel Iason's arm, but it was his first whipping, and he knew it would take him to the very brink of hell. But at least Daryl was spared; and soon Daryl would be in his arms, in his bed, in their shared apartment.

"I'll be home in a few hours," Iason said, departing without further comment.

Katze went out to the balcony, fingers shaking as he tried to light a smoke. He called the hospital once again with his pocket-phone, much to the head nurses' annoyance—Katze had been calling every hour to check on Daryl's condition. Informed rather curtly that he was stable and that nothing had changed, Katze let the phone and his smoke drop to the ground, burying his face in his hands.

Suddenly it was as if a flood broke loose. He tried to stop the tears but couldn't; it wasn't like him to cry, but when it came to Daryl, he hardly knew himself anymore. He loved the kid so much it hurt. Now he was crying tears of worry as well as tears of joy—he couldn't believe Daryl was going to be released from his Furniture duties, that soon they would be living together like normal lovers. And now he cried a little for himself, too...afraid of the night that was ahead.

* * *

Riki remained in his room for hours, pants off, feeling as though his ass was on fire. His earlier pairing with Enyu was now exceedingly puzzling to him, almost as if he had been acting in a dream. He got some satisfaction, though, that he had made cat-boy whimper; the memory of Enyu's yelps made him giggle. But he was still pissed at Iason about the room situation and he wasn't about to let the matter drop.

"You really got your ass whipped this time." Katze stood in the doorway, leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed on his chest.

Riki's eyes were immediately drawn to the taming stick and belt that he wore.

"What! Did Iason give you that?"

Katze smiled, patting the taming stick. "Yep. In case you need correction."

"Hey—that slap fucking hurt, by the way," Riki grumbled, then smiled. "I bet you got off, you pervert."

"I'll get off even more taming you with this," Katze replied, caressing the sheathed stick. "So you'd better behave, or I'll be more than happy to make you howl."

"Dickhead. Don't get all puffed up on your little power trip."

"I've come here for one purpose, Riki. And you're not going to like it."

Now Katze revealed what he had been holding in one hand—silk ties. Riki stared at him, the perplexed look on his face making Katze laugh.

"Don't get too excited. I'm tying you up, but not for the reason you've always dreamed of."

"Why the hell are you tying me up?" he demanded, ignoring Katze's joke.

Katze pulled the unmistakable thin aerosol can from his pocket—accelerator.

"Hell no!" Riki cried, jumping up.

Katze immediately whipped the taming stick out and held it up threateningly. "Lie back down, Riki."

"You wouldn't dare."

"Care to try me on that?" Katze tapped the stick in his hand suggestively.

"Come on, Katze—that stuff stings like hell," Riki protested.

"Iason's orders."

"Can't you just...spray it in the air and then tell him you did it?"

"Dumbass. He'd be able to tell when you didn't heal fast."

"Please, Katze," the mongrel begged.

"Sorry, Riki." Katze pushed him back onto the bed and tied his wrists to the bedposts.

“Fucking Iason,” Riki muttered, irritated.

“He was worried sick about you, you know. When you disappeared. I’ve never seen him like that.”

“Oh yeah?” Riki perked up a little at this.

“I could’ve sworn I saw him cry.”

Riki smiled, but his expression quickly changed when he felt Katze straddle his legs to hold him down and then began spraying the accelerator. He screamed, feeling like he wanted to die. He fucking hated accelerator.

“Almost done,” Katze said, pausing to push up Riki’s shirt.

“I’m gonna kill you when you’re done,” the mongrel threatened. “I’ll stick that spray-can up your ass.”

“Ooo, don’t tease me. I bet you say that to all the boys.”

“Dammit, Katze, I’m not fucking kidding. You have no idea how much this hurts.”

“No...but I’m about to find out. Iason’s punishing me tonight.”

“Tonight?”

“Yep. And I don’t want scars...more scars, that is. So I want you to do this for me tonight.”

“Scars? Katze, it’s not like he’s going to whip you.”

“Actually, yes. It’s a whipping.”

“Oh fuck,” Riki breathed, remembering well the public whipping of the unfortunate nameless pet with the nice ass. “Iason can really be a mean fucker sometimes.”

“Yeah,” Katze conceded.

“Damn. I’m sorry. Shit. That’s my fault, too...isn’t this for Serendipity?”

“It’s not your fault...well, yes it is,” he grinned.

“You know you wanted it,” Riki teased.

“Details, details. So will you do the same for me tonight?”

“I would if you had one for me to suck.”

Katze smiled. “Just rub my face in it, how about.” There was a time when Riki’s insensitive teasing would have really stung, but now he took such remarks in stride. “Hey. Don’t ever tease Daryl

about that," he added, solemnly, knowing that his lover had never really adjusted to his loss.

"I wouldn't. Sorry. That was...I'm an asshole, I guess."

"Yeah, pretty much," Katze agreed.

"Prick."

"Keep teasing and I'll make you yelp like a punished pup."

Riki laughed. "That one wasn't intentional. And...you wouldn't dare."

"Wouldn't I?" Katze slid the taming stick from the sheath and slapped it against his hand. "Ohh...this is so tempting...you're tied up and everything," he grinned.

"Katze! I swear. Don't even think about it. Use that thing on me and I'll knock your fucking lights out."

"Oh, I'd like to see you try. You think you could take me on? After I slapped you, I thought you might cry."

"That did fucking hurt," Riki admitted, laughing. "What the hell was that about?"

"Unlike you, I know that when Iason's watching, you obey without question. Don't expect special treatment from me because we're friends; in Iason's presence, his word is absolute."

"Oh god. You sound like Daryl now."

Katze smiled at the mere mention of his Daryl. "I'll do whatever he commands and I strongly advise you to do the same. If he tells me to ram this stick up your ass, that's where it's going."

"It's already been there, thanks."

"What?" Katze laughed.

"I was trying to...oh fuck. Never mind."

Now Katze laughed so hard that he had tears in his eyes. "You were trying to do what, you little pervert? Holy shit. The things you come up with."

"Yeah, well."

Katze slid the stick back into its sheath. "So. Will you...apply the accelerator on me tonight?"

"Yeah, but...that stuff on lashmarks is gonna sting something wicked...it'll be like being punished again."

“I can take it. And so can you—here’s the rest of this.”

As Katze sprayed the remaining accelerator on Riki back, the mongrel’s screams once again filled the penthouse, drawing Enyu’s attention.

Enyu had been at the very brink of orgasm during the first set of screams, and so had not been at liberty to explore what was going on. Now he left his room, quietly padding down the hall to Riki’s room, where he peeked in to see what was happening.

Riki was tied to the bed, straddled by Katze, who wore a taming stick and was spraying something on the mongrel’s back, which apparently was the source of his consternation. Katze sprayed until the can was empty, then got up and untied his unhappy patient.

Riki turned and saw Enyu. “What the fuck? Get out of here, you feline freak!”

“I’m not in your room. Technically I’m in the hall, which you don’t own. And you didn’t close the door, so?”

Now Riki changed his strategy. “You sure make a fuss when you’re getting fucked, cat-boy,” he said, eyes gleaming. “I’m a little worried you didn’t enjoy it.”

“Who could enjoy it with a mongrel?” Enyu retorted.

“If I had wanted you to enjoy it, you would have purring, lover,” Riki replied. “But that was hardly my objective.”

“You just wait until Master Iason has me take you.”

Riki laughed. “Dream on, sweetheart. It’s not happening.”

Enyu smiled mysteriously. “We’ll see. Those bruises are quite impressive, Riki. You must be very proud Master Iason loves you so much to leave such tokens of his regard.”

“You fucking little—” Now Riki leapt from the bed and charged after Enyu, who immediately took off running down the hall. Both pets went running through the penthouse, Riki still wearing only his shirt. As they passed Iason’s favorite chair, one of them knocked over the end table, sending a lamp crashing to the floor.

“Riki! Enyu! Stop this instant!” Katze bellowed, taking off after them.

The pets reached the great hall and began running around the dining table.

Now Katze whipped out his taming stick and slammed it down on the table with a loud whack. Enyu and Riki both stopped, staring at him with surprise.

“That’s it. Three strikes each. Riki, you’re first. Put your palms on the table.”

“Oh come on, Katze,” Riki whispered. “You can’t be serious.”

“I most certainly am serious. Now, Riki.”

Hesitating, Riki slowly obeyed, placing his palms on the table, sure that Katze only meant to give him a little tap. When Katze unleashed a stinging blow to his already sore thighs, he yelped with pain and surprise. The second and third strikes were equally hard, and he struggled to blink back tears.

“Enyu, you’re next. Palms on the table.”

Enyu stood, frozen, staring at Katze in disbelief. He had never heard of a Furniture that had the authority to discipline pets. Surely he really wasn’t going to strike him...with that stick?

“Did you hear me? Palms on the table, NOW.”

But Enyu continued to stand, his fear now evident in his eyes. Riki watched him with pleasure. Cat-boy was wiggling out.

“That’s six strikes for you now, Enyu. Want more? Just keep standing there and I’ll keep adding them.”

Enyu moved forward, slowly, and placed his palms on the table.

“Riki, raise his garment for me.”

Delighted with his assignment, the mongrel pulled up Enyu’s gown to reveal his beautiful bare bottom, and held it there.

Katze repositioned himself and then, with a mighty swing, delivered the first blow to his upper thighs. He felt he needed to strike Enyu much harder than Riki to make their punishments equal, considering Riki’s compromised state.

Enyu cried out in agony. He had never been disciplined before, and now it was much worse than he could have imagined. There was no way he could endure five more strikes. He was now terrified of Katze, deeply regretting his earlier attitude toward him. Clearly

he had gravely underestimated his power and importance; it was obvious now he enjoyed special status with their master. The second and third strikes were equally brutal, landing on his bottom, and Enyu howled and then bit his lip to keep from crying, opening his eyes wide, but then came the fourth, and the fifth, and finally, the sixth strike, and it was too much. He began sobbing.

Riki was gloating over Enyu's breakdown, but wisely said nothing.

"Both of you go to your rooms until Master Iason comes home," Katze said, sternly, and both pets obeyed, Enyu practically running there.

Riki punched Katze in the arm as he left the great hall. "Thanks a lot, asshole."

Katze laughed, returning the taming stick to its sheath. Next he went to Iason's command center and put in a visual to Xian Sami, the stunning Blondie who was most famous for his unusual eyes. He was the only Blondie that did not have blue eyes—his were a piercing green. It was a deviation that had perplexed Jupiter, one of a series of unexpected mutations that had mysteriously appeared in the Blondie pool.

The Blondie answered, intoxicating virile as usual, his gaze smolderingly intense. As always, he wore a long braid in his hair that hung down the side of his face, bound with leather metal-stopped tassels, which gave him the look of an ancient barbarian. "Katze. My regards to your Master."

"Thank you, Sir Xian. Master Iason wanted me to contact you regarding Juthian; he would like the boy as soon as you are prepared to let him go."

"Certainly. He has just been through modification today. With acceleration he should be ready in two days. I'll have him sent...no—I'll bring him the day after tomorrow."

"Very good."

"This is much sooner than his original plan," Xian commented, fishing for information.

“Yes; Master Iason hopes you will forgive his eagerness to have Juthian here so soon, but Daryl is in the hospital with a kidney infection, so he would like to begin training Juthian right away.”

“Are you back at the penthouse now, Katze?”

“Yes, Sir Xian. Temporarily.”

“So then you’ll be doing the training?”

“Yes,” he answered, now wanting to bring the conversation to a close before Xian thought of something else to ask. “I’ll let Master Iason know that he can expect you in two days.”

“Of course.”

“Thank you, Sir Xian.”

Xian nodded, cutting off the transmission. He stared at the screen for a moment, wondering what was really going on at the penthouse. One of his gifts was his ability to ferret out the truth; Katze had lied to him about the kidney infection. He smiled; most likely Iason had disciplined him a little too enthusiastically.

Juthian had been terrified when Xian told him he was destined to serve Iason Mink, to attend the Blondie’s infamous mongrel pet. Although he was somewhat flattered at being chosen by the powerful Blondie, he was far too intimidated by him feel much more than fear. And learning that he was to become Furniture was devastating to him. His whole existence had been based on his sexuality, and for that to be taken away was unthinkable. Yet, it was better than life in a brothel; Juthian would continue to live in luxury at Iason’s famous penthouse, although it would be difficult to learn how to serve rather than be served. He was resigned to accept what his master had chosen for him, however, his public whipping having dispelled all urges toward disobedience.

The blank screen signaled the end of the connection; Katze left the command station, heading toward the kitchen when the door buzzed.

Katze pressed the intercom. “Yes?”

“Delivery for Sir Iason Mink. From Sir Omaki Ghan,” came the tiny voice.

“Put your hand on the scanner, please.”

The boy obeyed, his signature reading as Omaki's pet.

Katze opened the door then and accepted the large box from the boy, who seemed unusually young to be a pet, especially to be delivering something for his master. Only older pets attended to such tasks.

"Who drove you here?" Katze asked.

"Master Omaki," the boy said, sweetly, eyes wide.

Katze chuckled softly. No doubt he wanted to show off how young his pet was—far too young, in Katze's opinion. Omaki Ghan was a total pervert.

"So how do you like living in the Taming Tower?" Katze asked.

"It's fun," the boy said, eagerly. "Omaki built me a slide that goes all the way from the top down to the bottom, round and round!"

"I see," Katze replied, amused. He wondered what other things Omaki had for his pretty little pet to play with. "What's your name?"

"Aki."

"Can you find your way back down by yourself, Aki?"

"Yeah," he said, uncertainly.

"Turn that way," Katze pointed, "see the elevator there?"

"Oh yeah." The boy smiled at him, breathtakingly beautiful. "Bye!"

"Bye," Katze said, shaking his head.

He brought the box into the penthouse and set it on the bar counter, wondering what was in it. He smiled; coming from Omaki, he could only imagine.

* * *

When Iason returned, he immediately noticed the box, but chose to ignore it for the moment.

"Wine, Iason?" Katze asked, immediately moving to the bar.

"Yes. So...did you have to use that?" Iason asked, nodding towards his taming stick.

"I'm afraid so."

“Is that so?” Iason smiled. “Riki?”

“Both of them.”

The Blondie chuckled. “And how did Enyu take it?”

“Pretty hard. He’s a little soft, that one. I don’t think he’s ever been disciplined before.”

“What did they do?”

“Ran through the penthouse and broke a lamp.”

The Blondie nodded, smiling. He could just picture it. “Did you contact Xian?”

Katze handed him his wine. “Yes. He says Juthian will be ready the day after tomorrow; he’ll bring him. And...I applied the accelerator to Riki.”

“Did you have to tie him down?”

“Yes. He was rather reluctant.”

“I have no doubt.”

Katze shifted his weight anxiously. “So...may I go to the hospital now?”

“You may. Be back by nine.”

“Thank you, Iason,” Katze said, giving him a little bow and immediately heading for the door.

Once outside the penthouse, he practically ran to the elevator, cursing its slow descent to the ground level. He sprinted to his car, fortunately parked nearby, in reserved VIP parking next to Iason’s sleek hovercraft prowler. With trembling fingers he punched in his codes and then, backing up with a squeal, took off for Tanagura Medical, offending a series of outraged drivers on the way.

At the hospital he parked illegally; but with Iason’s ID tag, he knew no one would dare move him. He rushed inside and made for Daryl’s room, ignoring the head nurse as he dashed passed her station.

Daryl was awake, and, on seeing him, smiled the prettiest smile Katze had ever seen in his life.

“Hey love,” he said, softly, approaching him slowly.

“Hey.”

“Are you in pain?”

“A little,” Daryl conceded. “I’m glad you’re here. That one nurse is scary.”

Katze laughed. “You mean the one with the blue hair and the stick up her ass?”

“Yeah. That one.”

Lady Blue-Hair was now at the door, hand on hip. “This is a hospital, young man. You cannot come running in here like it’s some kind of circus.”

“My apologies. Sir Iason is anxious to know how his Furniture is doing.”

“Hmphf,” she sniffed, unimpressed with the mention of Iason Mink, but smart enough to know not to insult Tanagura Medical’s greatest benefactor. She turned on her heel and left in a huff.

Daryl giggled. “You can’t run in here like it’s some kind of circus? Since when do people run at a circus?”

Katze laughed, thrilled to see his lover in good spirits. “Maybe they do when the big cats escape.” He curled up his hands as though getting ready to scratch him, hissing like an angry cat, then bent down and kissed him gently on the lips. Daryl returned his kiss, tongue flicking sensually in his mouth, and for some moments they loved one another thus, savoring their hard-earned reunion.

“Oh love...I’ve been worried sick about you,” Katze moaned. “I’ve been going out of my mind.”

“I’ve missed you so much, Katze.”

“Hey, boyfriend.” Katze pushed on his nose like it was a button. “We’re going to be living together soon.”

Daryl grinned. “I know. I can’t...believe it.”

Katze shook his head. “Me either. Though I can see why Iason’s doing it—you’re fucking brilliant with computers.”

“He says I have to train his new Furniture first.”

“I’m going to be starting that. It’s Juthian, Xian Sami’s pet.”

“The one that got whipped? He’s going to be modified?”

“Already happened. Today. He’ll be at the penthouse day after tomorrow.”

“And you’re training him?”

“Yeah. Iason had me come and take over your duties. I’ve been sleeping in your bed,” he added, smiling.

“Really?”

“Guess what else. Jupiter gave Iason a new pet—a Xeronian.”

“Seriously? What about Riki?”

“Iason appears to be keeping them both. You know he’d never give up Riki.” Now he laughed. “You should see the two of them...they’re at each other like two brothers.”

“I bet,” Daryl said, smiling.

“I even had to punish them today.” Katze grinned. “With a taming stick.”

“What! Iason never let me do that!”

“It was sexy as hell. Oh! And Iason had them pair. I got to see the whole thing.”

“I’m missing everything fun!” Daryl lamented.

“Then you’d better hurry up and get better. That’s an order.”

“Oh yeah? What will you do if I don’t?” Daryl teased.

Katze leaned close to him, expressionless. “Spank you. In fact, I think I’ll do that even if you get better, just for putting me through all this.”

“No matter what I do I’ll get spanked!” he protested, eyes shining.

“Stop fussing. You know you want it.”

“Yeah. I do,” Daryl confessed, then lowered his voice. “I want to be in your arms again.”

“All right then,” Katze replied, climbing up onto his bed and snuggling up to him.

“Katze!” Daryl giggled. “That blue-haired lady will come.”

“Let her come. I can take her on, the old bat.”

For quite awhile the two lovers lay together, snuggling, catching up on weeks of missed time and the flurry of events in the past few days. Katze opted not to tell Daryl about what was waiting for him when he got home, not wanting anything to worry him as he made his recovery. As the hour drew close to nine, he simply said that Iason wanted him back early.

“I’m sure he does,” Daryl laughed. “Riki is enough of a handful.”

“Yeah, and Enyu’s reaching his rutting period, so it’s getting real interesting.”

“Xeronian, wow. I’ve heard they’re beautiful.”

“You should see his eyes. Riki calls him cat-boy.”

“Are you attracted to him?” Daryl’s jealousy was transparent, amusing Katze.

“No, silly. I’ve got what I want right here.” He leaned down and kissed him. “And don’t you forget it. Now, turn over onto your tummy, if you can.”

“Why?”

“Obey me!”

Giggling, Daryl did so, yelping when Katze began spanking him, just a few playfully hard spansks for fun.

“There. You deserved that, naughty boy.”

“What for?” Daryl demanded.

“Just because I said so. So you’ll learn to mind me. You can roll back over now.”

Daryl rolled onto his back, smiling up at his lover with shining eyes. “I love you, Katze.”

“Daryl...I love you, too, but those three words can’t possibly express what I feel for you,” he whispered, kissing him, a long, unhurried kiss that conveyed the ever-expanding boundaries of his love.

Punishing Katze

“Juthian.”

The sound of his master’s voice drifted into his consciousness and, struggling against the pain, Juthian opened his eyes.

The Blondie stared down at him curiously; he was drinking a cognac, as usual, seeming rather impassive about his pet’s state. What Juthian did not know is that he had been standing there watching him for nearly an hour.

He lifted the bed sheet that covered him—there was nothing to see but a bandage, but even that revealed that his pet was no longer equipped. Instead, his pelvic region was flat—sunken between his hipbones. He let the sheet fall.

Juthian did not need to ask if it was over; the agonizing pain told him he had indeed been castrated. In his last moments before falling unconscious, he had fantasized that all of this was just a ploy on his master’s part to frighten him, another one of his punishments, and that he was still to be Master Xian’s pet. But now he knew it was true; and what hurt even more than his physical pain was the knowledge that his master did not want him anymore.

“Are you in pain?” Xian asked, and then, without really waiting for his response, called out to the medical attendant for some pain relief. The youth rushed over and administered an opiate intravenously, which Juthian felt almost immediately, sighing.

“Your new master, Iason Mink wants you soon. You’ll be going the day after tomorrow.”

Juthian nodded bravely. He was going to miss his master’s face; he had come to truly enjoy performing for him, watching him

pleasure himself, and had loved brushing out his hair each day and putting in his braid, which Master Xian had insisted that he—and not a Furniture—do. Stupidly, he had believed that the Blondie felt something for him. Until very recently he had pampered him with every sort of luxury, and he was always buying him gifts, and wanting him to sit on his lap and—kissing him, on the forehead or cheek. The pure lust on his face while he watched Juthian, either alone or paired, was exciting to his pet, who did everything in his power to please him.

And then...he had opened the forbidden box.

Juthian still could not believe how angry his master became over that, how, in that instant, everything between them was simply swept away. In his heart Juthian felt he had been treated a little unfairly, that what he had done was not a transgression worthy of a public whipping and complete rejection by his master. He felt...yes, a little angry with his master. But mostly...hurt.

But then he was only a pet. He had no right to question his Blondie master's prohibitions or decisions. One thing was certain—he would be more careful with his new master.

Xian seemed to hesitate for a moment, as though he wanted to say something. He took another sip of his cognac, gazing at Juthian with glimmering green eyes. "You should be prepared," he started, then stopped. "Your new master may...want certain things."

Juthian felt like laughing. Did his master honestly think he didn't know about Iason and his famous mongrel pet? Everyone knew Iason Mink took Riki. But his new master wouldn't want a scarred Furniture. No one would.

"I will obey my master in all things," he replied, weakly.

Xian looked relieved. "You should be quite flattered. Iason Mink specifically called to ask for you. You...will have a very comfortable life in his penthouse."

"Yes, Master." Juthian waited, wondering why his master seemed to dally.

"Ju. I would like to...kiss you. Think of it as a goodbye kiss."

Juthian's heart began to pound. His master had never kissed him before, except on the cheek or forehead, and he had a distinct feeling this was not the kind of kiss his master wanted now.

Perceiving his silence as acquiescence, Xian put his drink down and leaned down. He moved close and then paused before gently brushing Juthian's lips with his own. Kissing him a little harder, he slid his tongue tentatively into his mouth, then began exploring him slowly, prodding his mouth open wider. His passion increasing, Xian now kissed him hungrily, thrilled when Juthian responded. For a long, long time they kissed thus, expressing in that moment all the pent-up forbidden desires they had each secretly harbored for the other, realizing what might have been, if they had both only dared. Xian wished now that he had not been so hard on his pet, that he had not threatened to sell him and thus garner the interest of Iason Mink. Xian couldn't refuse Iason, and he was proud that the Blondie wanted his Juthian, but now he found that he didn't want to part with him. Now he wished...he could have kept him for his own, the way Iason kept Riki.

It was their first kiss, intoxicatingly erotic, sweet and sad—for it was also their last.

* * *

"You drove here on your own?" Raoul asked, surprised, climbing into his vehicle.

"I put it on automatic," Yui replied, feeling a little proud of his accomplishment. In truth, he had been scared out of his mind on the Tanagura and Midas freeways.

Raoul nodded, impressed. He could perhaps entrust Yui to more than he had previously.

"What about the car I drove, then? Are we just leaving it here?"

"I've already talked with Omaki. He'll have someone drive it back. I'll pay for their return trip."

Raoul could have had him drive separately, but he found he wanted Yui next to him. As he pulled out of the Taming Tower, he

realized that he and Yui had never gone anywhere together in a vehicle before. The Blondie was accustomed to driving alone, and he found Yui's presence...relaxing. He looked over at the youth, marveling over his physical beauty—his shiny, light chestnut hair, vividly green eyes, and refined, almost princely features. Raoul had picked out Yui at Midas Orphanage five years before; as soon as he set eyes on the boy, he knew he wanted him. Yui had agreed to modification without hesitation; he had grown up an orphan and had never known the luxuries that Raoul offered him. Yui had been pretty then, but now...he was undeniably breathtaking.

The Taming Tower had been a turning point for them. Although neither of them spoke for a long time, there was a difference in their relationship. Raoul could not quite put his finger on it, but he felt...grateful, really, to Yui. It was more than that. He had found the boy's gentle touch comforting. And strangely, he was beginning to have...certain thoughts.

Yui puzzled over why his master kept looking at him, his heart beating a little faster each time he did so. Surely he was mistaking his master's look....but it almost seemed to him that Raoul was considering him sexually.

Suddenly Raoul reached over and put his hand on Yui's thigh. Yui allowed this without comment, although his heart was now pounding fast. His Blondie master said nothing, but began moving his hand a little, caressing him.

Merely touching Yui in this forbidden way was deeply arousing to the Blondie, who now found that he was trembling, just a bit.

What was he doing?

As if stung, Raoul suddenly withdrew his hand, again without a word. Yui made no sound or movement, acting as though nothing had happened.

Inside, he experienced a flurry of emotions. His master had...touched him. Suggestively. It was too much to hope for. And the way he had looked at him—he was certain now, that gleam in his eyes had been lust. Yui swallowed, trying to make sense of what was happening, and longing for his master to touch him again.

Raoul was mulling over Yui's reaction to him. He hadn't protested, hadn't moved—hadn't said anything. Did that mean he didn't feel anything, had no views on what had just transpired? Did that mean...that if he wanted to go even further, Yui would submit to him without resistance?

For Raoul, the pursuit of forbidden pleasures was almost an artistic mandate. First he and Iason had shared an illicit union; then Iason had begun taking his pet, much to Raoul's annoyance. He only truly badgered Iason about it because he was jealous, not because it was forbidden—although he did worry about Jupiter. And then...Raoul had been invited to join in. Taking Riki had completely changed his perspective on tasting other forbidden pleasures. It seemed almost natural that Raoul would turn to Yui next.

They had arrived at the apartment complex and quickly made for his floor. Once inside, Yui was startled when Raoul grabbed him from behind, pulling his body close, his hands roaming up and down his body. He gasped when the Blondie began kissing his neck.

Bending close to his ear, his master whispered, "Undress."

Obeying without hesitation, Yui untied his belt and slipped off his robe. He felt the air on his exposed flesh as Raoul stepped back to appraise him. Then he felt the warmth of his master's hands as he began caressing him, especially his buttocks, which he spread hard with his hands, nearly making Yui lose his balance.

Raoul wanted to take Yui but found that he was too sore at the moment. He was rather painfully aroused, however. "Turn around," he commanded, unfastening his trousers to reveal himself.

Yui did so, looking up into his eyes with such gentleness that his master wanted to hug him close. He reached down and stroked his soft face, then took hold of his hand, guiding it to his erection.

Although he wanted to love his master, Yui did not know how. All he could do was try to imitate what he had seen pets do to one another. Kneeling, he took hold of his shaft. Raoul immediately placed his hand over his, repositioning it. "Like this."

Yui looked up uncertainly at the towering Blondie, unsure what to do next. Raoul found his innocence and uncertainty charming, now quite anxious to have his way with him, as soon as he was healed. He guided him with his hand, showing him how he wanted to be stroked. "Grip me a little tighter...yes. Just like that."

A bit of essence erupted from his master, and Yui instinctive licked it.

"Ohhh," Raoul moaned, surprised and excited. "Good boy. Keep doing that with your tongue...all around the head."

"Yes, Master."

These submissive words, along with the beautiful youth's lingual explorations were enough to almost take Raoul to the brink. They had hardly started and already he wanted to come.

"Open your mouth," he whispered, urgently.

Yui obeyed, admitting and pleasuring him eagerly, a sight extraordinarily stimulating to his Blondie master. And as Raoul ejaculated into his mouth, far sooner than he had intended, he realized that his relationship with Yui would never again be the same.

* * *

"Riki! Enyu!" The unmistakable bellow of their Blondie master sent both pets rushing to the great hall, where Iason sat in his chair, legs crossed, wine glass in hand.

"I understand that Katze was forced to discipline the two of you this afternoon," he said, sipping his wine. "That's most unfortunate. For his trouble, I'm going to give you both a few spanks. Perhaps in the future you will think twice before acting like wild boys when I'm away."

"But...Ia—Master Iason," Riki whispered imploringly, "I'm so sore. Can't I...have mine tomorrow?"

"No, pet. This will be a lesson for you—if Katze is forced to use that taming stick when I'm away, you'll be getting another round of

discipline from me when I get home. Come here.” Iason set his wine glass down, patting his lap.

Reluctantly, Riki shuffled forward, flinching when Iason grabbed him firmly and pulled him over his knee, and then wincing when the Blondie pulled his pants down.

Removing his glove with his teeth, Iason proceeded to administer a few hard spanks; not many—but enough to make Riki cry out all the same. The poor mongrel was so sore that he found even this small bit of punishment brought him close to tears, but he bore it stoically, finding it nothing compared to what he had been through that morning.

Setting him roughly back on his feet, Iason gave him a stern look. “I strongly advise you to behave, Riki. You’re in no state for more discipline.”

“Yes, Master,” he murmured, eyes averted.

“Enyu. You’re next.” Iason pointed to his lap, waiting.

Enyu stared at him, horrified. He had already been punished brutally by that mean Furniture, and now Master Iason was going to spank him? What kind of hell had Jupiter sent him to?

“Did you hear me? Obey me, now!” Iason commanded, sharply.

But the Xeronian felt paralyzed, unable to physically move toward the fearsome Blondie.

“You’ve just doubled your punishment,” the Blondie warned.

Suddenly, without really thinking about what he was doing, he did what he had witnessed Riki do—he ran.

Dashing back toward the guest wing, he ran with all his might toward the pool entrance at the end of the hall. In his mind he knew he was only getting himself in worse trouble, but he was so frightened that he was desperate to believe he could escape his Blondie master’s punishment.

Surprised, Iason remained sitting for a moment, then laughed softly. He was going to have to put an end to this disobedience now, before he had two naughty pets to deal with on a regular basis. He took another sip of his wine, then got up and with deliberate

slowness went off leisurely after his unruly pet. Riki skipped after him, excitedly, smirking with utter delight.

The Blondie's footsteps echoed down the long corridor. Iason seemed to guess exactly where the Xeronian might try to hide, making for the pool area. He passed the first pool and then went outside onto the balcony. Enyu was at the far end of the deck, pathetically attempting to hide behind a fountain statue of an ancient Amoian dark horse.

"You've just made this much worse for yourself, Enyu. Now you've earned yourself a sound spanking," Iason said, harshly.

"Please, Master Iason," Enyu begged, crying, "Please—I'll do anything! Please don't spank me, please! I know I shouldn't have run...I'm sorry! I'm so scared!"

Riki giggled at Enyu's complete lack of dignity in the face of certain punishment.

"Hush, Riki," Iason said sharply. "Or I'll turn you over my knee again, too."

The Blondie's threat was followed by dead silence, and then Enyu's pathetic sobbing.

"Save those tears, Enyu. You'll need them," the Blondie said, approaching him menacingly. "And if I have to walk all the way over there to get you, you're really going to regret it."

Terrified of this threat, but unable to move, Enyu cowered, closing his eyes as though hoping to make the horrible situation go away.

Riki was biting his lip to keep from howling, jumping up and down on his bare feet with glee.

Iason made his way over to where Enyu was sitting, cowering, face buried in his arms. "I'm a little surprised at your choice, Enyu," he said, sternly, crouching down, his beautiful thighs bulging out of his thin body suit, his hair trailing on the ground, shining in the evening sun. "I thought I wouldn't have a problem with you, but it seems I was mistaken. Look at me."

Reluctantly, Enyu lifted his head, peering up at his Blondie master with terror.

“I won’t tolerate this kind of disobedience, pet. When I tell you to do something, you’ll do it.” He stood up, towering over him, hands on his hips. “You made me come and get you, and now you’re going to be punished for it. If you’re smart,” now Iason paused, glancing over at Riki pointedly, “you’ll learn something from this and modify your future behavior accordingly.” Yanking him roughly to his feet, he proceeded to drag him all the way back to his chair—the “punishment chair” as Riki thought of it, since it had become almost a ritual for his master to administer spankings there.

Enyu whimpered all the way to the chair, frightened out of his mind after the spanking he had just witnessed that morning. Jupiter had said that Iason Mink was special—different from other Blondies, and now he was starting to understand what he meant. But he was failing Jupiter’s commission—to drive a wedge between Iason and his mongrel pet. Jupiter had promised him that the Blondie would be pleased with his sexual gifts and would probably sell Riki very soon, if Enyu succeeded in his mission. Then he would be the only pet of the powerful Iason Mink. But Jupiter hadn’t said anything about being beaten with a stick by a strange Furniture or being brutally spanked by his new master. And so far, Iason seemed just as attached to his mongrel pet, unnaturally so, in his view.

Reaching his chair, Iason sat down and pulled Enyu over his knee, pulling up his garment to reveal his bare bottom and keeping the pet’s arms pinned behind his back. Enyu’s flesh showed the marks from the taming stick, but other than that, his skin was flawless.

“Have you ever been spanked before?” Iason asked, resting his hand on the boy’s smooth, hot skin, and caressing him with his thumb.

“No, Master,” Enyu answered, trembling, now troubled by an emerging erection from Iason’s touch.

The Blondie felt his stirring on this thigh and smiled. “Are you aroused even now, my Enyu?”

Riki started at his master’s use of the word “my” when addressing Enyu, finding it most distasteful.

“Yes, Master,” Enyu admitted.

“That’s only because you don’t know what’s coming. Now, you are going to learn, Enyu, that when I command you to do something, you will obey immediately, without question. Running away constitutes a serious act of disobedience that requires prompt correction. Do you understand?”

“Yes...Master!” Enyu cried out now, terrified.

“Good. We’re making progress already.” Iason took another leisurely sip of his wine, then set the glass back on the table. “Now. It’s time for your first lesson.” With that, the Blondie whipped his arm back and stuck the prostrate pet with such a loud and violent spank that even Riki was surprised, eyes widening with pleasure. Thus commenced Enyu’s wickedly brutal spanking at the hands of the Blondie Mink, the smacks of his spanking painfully loud, his screams and sobs almost unbearable to listen to.

Riki was beside himself with joy to see cat-boy getting a sound spanking, even getting aroused by the sight of his beautiful Master in motion and Enyu’s bottom growing red. And of course, cat-boy’s cries and screams, his pathetic begging, his whimpers and sobs, were priceless. For once, someone other than himself was getting a taste of Iason’s fearsome arm.

Enyu never knew there could be pain like this. It was unbearable, unrelenting, merciless—barbarian. Master Iason was horrifying as a disciplinarian, and the Xeronian felt like he would die. Maybe he WOULD die on the Blondie’s lap...and then his Master would be sorry. This last thought gave him a little comfort, especially since he was pretty certain that these were his last moments on Amoi. It was impossible to endure this much pain and not die, surely.

Though his hand burned dreadfully, Iason continued to spank Enyu with all the force of his arm. He was determined to curb Enyu’s disobedience right from the start; and he had to admit, he was enjoying punishing the seductive little Xeronian that had been thrust upon him by Jupiter. The sight of the pet’s beautiful bottom now red as the setting sun was enormously satisfying—and

stimulating—to him, and the harder he spanked, the more his erection grew.

When at length he brought the spanking to an end, Enyu lay limply over his knees, sobbing so loudly and forlornly that Iason had to smile. He felt confident that, unlike Riki, Enyu would most likely be completely obedient from this moment onward, and so his punishment would work as a deterrent.

That it had not worked with Riki was puzzling to him, although he was now convinced the mongrel simply had not been punished severely enough, though he had certainly not been spared his arm. Riki was a deviant, to be sure, and taming him was taking far longer, and had been far more difficult, than he had anticipated—now over two years. The Blondie now realized that to tame him, he would have to completely break him. And part of him just didn't want to do that.

But Enyu...he felt sure that the spanking had worked its magic. The Xeronian would not be acting up any time soon.

He rubbed his hand over the pet's hot, punished flesh, now quite aroused. With trembling fingers, he pressed his cheeks apart to get a peek at his portal, marveling over its tiny spiral. Unable to resist, he inserted a finger, intrigued to discover that the pet's grip was just as tight as before. He wiggled his finger a bit, curious.

Enyu started to calm at his master's exploration, hoping desperately that the Blondie would continue. Riki watched this developing situation jealously, finally unable to bear it.

He sat down at Iason's feet, leaning possessively against his leg and yearning for attention.

Iason smiled. "What, does this make you jealous, pet?"

"Yes, Master," he admitted.

The Blondie laughed, removing his finger, much to Enyu's disappointment, and set him on his feet. "So, Enyu. Did I make clear the importance of obedience, and what happens to naughty pets in my household?"

"Yes, Master," the Xeronian answered, wiping his eyes.

“Good. Go wash your face and stay in your room until I call you.”

Enyu obeyed, head down as he slunk away.

“Come here, pet,” Iason said, holding a hand out to Riki.

He rose up eagerly, climbing onto his master’s lap, though wincing as he sat down. Iason wrapped his arms around him, giving him a kiss on his cheek. “Are you looking forward to tonight, love?” he whispered.

“Yes, Master,” he answered, excited.

“We’re alone now, pet. You no longer need to address me so, unless I instruct you, only when we are in the presence of others.”

“It’s about fucking time,” Riki replied. “I was going out of my mind, Master this, Master that. I know you were getting off on it, too.”

Iason laughed. “But, Riki, I AM your master, so it is only appropriate you should address me so.”

“And now you have two pets to call you master,” Riki grumbled.

“And two pets to spank. Don’t tell me you’re still jealous of Enyu, after you paired with him, and after I spanked him so?”

“You always said that I would be your special pet. And now you have another one, too,” the mongrel complained. “Which fucking sucks.”

“Concerning Enyu, it’s only temporary,” Iason assured him. “But you will always be mine.”

Smiling at this, Riki snuggled up against him. “So I can do whatever I want tonight, right?”

“Yes, pet. Within reason,” he qualified.

“What! You never said that before!”

“If you thought you were going to be able to paddle me, then no, pet.”

“Fuck.”

Iason laughed. “Oh, I see. You had an agenda of punishment worked out for me, is that it?”

“Could I...spank you just a little, or use the G-strap?”

“You may. But Riki, when I tell you to stop, you must stop. Understood?”

“Yeah,” Riki muttered, wishing he had the luxury of cutting off his punishment when it got too unbearable. But still—some discipline was better than none at all.

“Now that I think of it, the G-strap is gone. The drawer was emptied out the night Raoul took you,” Iason said, thoughtfully. “I need to contact Raoul about that.”

“Iason?”

“Yes, pet?”

“How...did you find me yesterday? Raoul said he blocked the tracer signal.”

Iason sighed, closing his eyes and resting his head back on the chair. “He did, pet. When I realized there was no way to find you, I nearly...went out of my mind.” As if suddenly flooded by memories of the previous day’s drama, the Blondie pulled his pet close, hugging him tightly. “Oh Riki...I don’t know what I would have done.” Other than kill Raoul, he thought privately.

“I knew you would come.”

Iason hugged him tighter, not wanting to frighten his pet with the cold truth—that without his tracer signature, he should not have been able to find him. The fact that he had was freakish, almost supernatural.

“So...how DID you find me?” Riki’s whispered, his face pressed against his master’s chest so closely that he could hear his heartbeat, steady and solid.

“To be honest, pet, it’s something I can’t explain.”

“I tried to send you a message with mind about where I was,” Riki laughed. “Maybe you got it.”

Iason froze, then tilted Riki’s chin to look at him. “You...sent me a message...with your thoughts?”

“Yeah,” Riki shivered. “I know it’s dumb, but I was kinda...scared, actually.”

For a moment the Blondie said nothing, mulling this over. “Riki,” he said finally. “I saw you. In my mind, that is. It was...almost a vision. That’s how I knew where you were.”

Riki thought about this before replying. “There was this guy in Midas, who was poisoned by Agatha— just like you. He survived, too. And the rumor was that he developed certain...powers. Like he had visions, could see what was happening someplace else in the city. Personally I thought it was a load of bullcrap—I figured he was just trying to nail some ass. But...maybe there’s something to it, this whole deal with Agatha’s Halo.”

“Perhaps,” Iason said, smiling.

“Hey! Maybe we could develop it, and then we could send each other secret messages!”

Now the Blondie laughed, hugging him. “I’m never letting you go again, pet.”

“You think I’m being silly,” Riki sulked.

“Not at all. I’m all for the advancement of telepathy and other cerebral entertainment.”

“Yeah, well, I’m thinking we could use it somehow when we overthrow Jupiter!”

Iason put his hand over Riki’s mouth, glancing over at the guest wing. “Hush,” he whispered. “You are never to speak of such matters.”

“I was just joking!”

“All the same,” the Blondie replied in a low voice.

“Whatever,” Riki said, his voice still muffled by Iason’s hand. Then, mischievously, he stuck out his tongue, licking his master’s palm.

Surprised, Iason pulled his hand away, then laughed softly. “Naughty little pet.”

“You like me naughty,” Riki averred, pulling up his knees so that his bare feet were pressed against the inside of the chair and his partial erection exposed.

Iason reached between his legs and began fondling him. “Open your legs for me,” he whispered.

Gasping, Riki obeyed, letting his knees fall open, his eyes shining as the Blondie began stroking him more purposefully.

“That’s it. You like this, don’t you?”

“Yes,” his pet answered, breathing a little harder, now fully aroused.

The Blondie continued to pleasure him, his long fingers stroking his shaft and then exploring beneath, caressing him, searching for his portal. Then Iason pulled his hand away and sucked seductively on two fingers.

Riki moaned, squirming with lust.

The Blondie then inserted a finger and began slowly thrusting as he continued stroking him with his other hand.

“Ah!” Riki yelped, finding the multiple stimulation almost too much. He reached out to grab Iason’s hands, feeling that maybe he wanted him to stop, but then simply let his hands rest indecisively on his forearms as his master continued to pleasure him, as though torn between wanting him to stop and wanting him to continue.

“I can’t,” he cried, confused.

“Just let it happen, love,” the Blondie said, soothingly.

“It’s too...much.” Now Riki began pushing on his arm. “Take your finger out.”

Iason answered that by inserting a second finger, thrusting a little harder.

“Ohhh,” the mongrel moaned, biting his lip.

“Don’t fight it, Riki.”

“Iason!”

“Shhhh.” Iason now gripped his shaft and began pumping him, while he thrust his fingers wildly into him with his other hand.

“Oh god...oh fuck...ohhhh!”

“That’s it,” his master encouraged. “Don’t hold back.”

“Oh FUCK!”

“Yesss...just like that,” Iason breathed, excited.

“Yeah...oh god yeah.” Riki spread his legs wider and moved his feet further apart, letting his head fall back over the side of the chair.

“You’re my pretty pet. My beautiful little mongrel. Come for me, pet.”

“Ohhh,” Riki moaned, urgently, closing his eyes.

“That’s it! That’s it, Riki.” Iason was now so aroused he could hardly contain himself; he began pumping his pet so fast that there was simply no way the mongrel could resist ejaculating.

“Holy fuck,” he groaned, eyes rolling back as his semen shot up in glorious arcs, landing on his stomach and sliding down Iason’s hand.

“Beautiful,” Iason whispered.

Riki sighed, and after a moment gasped, “That was...fucking awesome.”

Iason was so rock-hard that he felt ready to burst. “Riki, I need to take you.”

“But I’m so sore,” Riki whined.

“I’m sorry, pet. Get up and bend over that table.”

Riki gave him a seductive gaze. “Why don’t you fuck Enyu?”

Iason laughed, amused. “What, now you’re pushing me on him? I thought you didn’t want me to take him?”

“Go ahead,” Riki said, feeling very smug and magnanimous, and also rather comfortable, having just ejaculated. “I know you want to. As long as you promise to let me watch, and you fuck him HARD.”

“Make sure you will not regret this later, love. Once I start I won’t be able to stop.”

“Fuck him,” Riki replied, eyes gleaming. “And then send him back to his room.”

Thrilled with his pet’s “permission” and now even more aroused, Iason called for Enyu, his heart starting to beat faster.

Enyu immediately rushed to the hall, eyes wide with fear.

“Disrobe, Enyu, and bend over that table.”

The sheer delight that lit up the Xeronian’s face was breathtaking. Enyu obeyed, untying his robe and letting it fall to the floor, then bent over, resting his torso on the cool wood surface, and lifting up onto his toes to give his master a good view.

The sight of the Enyu so obediently posed for acquisition, his bottom still bright red from his spanking, was thoroughly stimulating to the Blondie. Riki climbed off Iason's lap so he could get up. As his master rose, he stopped, bending down to kiss him. "You're such a good pet. You'll always be my favorite pet," he whispered in his ear, pleased that Riki wanted him to enjoy Enyu.

Then he approached the pretty fair-skinned Xeronian, unfastening his trousers to release himself. For a moment he simply stood, stroking his engorged organ as he contemplated what he was about to do. He was exceedingly aroused—and mostly because Riki had voluntarily pushed him to take the beautiful pet. It was his pet's actions that excited him most, although he was quite ready to possess the alluring youth who had been so titillating to him since his arrival. Pushing Enyu's legs further apart with his knees, he spread the youth and positioned himself for entry. He was going to honor Riki's mandate and take Enyu violently.

Grabbing onto his hips, he sunk deep into the Xeronian, gasping over his deliciously tight resistance. Enyu cried out in agony, the Blondie's immense size tearing him.

Iason groaned, withdrew completely, then repositioned himself, his feet further apart, and penetrated again, fully, pulling back on his hips as he pressed himself as deeply as he could. Thus commenced the fucking of Enyu by his new Blondie master.

Riki watched all this from the chair, relishing Enyu's anguished cries. He found he did not, at the moment, begrudge his master taking his new pet, because he knew Iason loved him and because he knew Enyu was in pain. Strangely, he wanted his master to fuck Enyu, wanted the Xeronian to cry out while his master's face contorted with pleasure, and then wanted to watch Iason walk away when he was finished, dismissing the pet without a second glance. By telling Iason to take his new pet, Riki felt he had seized control of the situation, which allowed him to give his master what he knew Iason wanted without feeling extraordinarily jealous.

"Ohhh," Iason moaned, unable to suppress a vocalization of his pleasure. Enyu felt so good; the Blondie wanted to keep fucking him

forever. And Riki wanted him to; his pet wanted to watch him take Enyu. This Iason found extraordinarily erotic...and he was going to come fast.

Riki watched his master, fascinated. Iason had never looked more handsome or masculine than he did at that moment, his face contorted with a look that was a cross between pleasure and pain. He was fucking Enyu brutally, selfishly, like a barbarian raping a captive, and the pet cried out with each stroke, beautifully erotic cries which only seemed to fuel the Blondie's lust. Riki was quite sure his master had never taken him that hard; Enyu would be sore, no question. Iason continually pulled back violently on his pet's hips, repositioning him and lifting his hips to get the deepest penetration possible. The Blondie began grunting, almost growling—a guttural sound that Riki had never heard him make before, as he plundered his pretty new pet.

Then, with glorious passion, Iason threw his head back and, eyes closed, released his essence, gasping softly and erratically. Shivering, he opened his eyes and withdrew, looking over at his watching pet.

Iason smiled. And it was a smile unlike Riki had ever seen before.

“Go to your room,” he commanded, dismissing Enyu without a second look, much to the ravished pet's dismay. But he had fodder for fantasy now—not that he needed it—and immediately went back to his room to coddle his rigid erection.

Riki had watched the entire episode without feeling jealous...not too much, anyway. As Iason returned to the chair, he bent down to kiss him. “I loved that you let me do that, Master Riki,” he whispered.

His pet beamed, adoring it when Iason called him Master. Then, he noticed something on the bar counter.

“What's in that box?” he asked.

Iason then remembered the box, and chuckled. “Go and see, pet.”

“Really?” Riki jumped up and ran to retrieve it, carting it back with obvious delight. “It’s from the Taming Tower!”

“How fortuitous.” The Blondie smiled at the odds of a box arriving from Omaki Ghan exactly when he had been stripped of his favorite instruments of discipline.

“Can I open it?” he shouted.

“Yes, pet. Might I remind you, however, that what you find in that box is most likely going to be used eventually on YOU.”

Ignoring this last warning, Riki tore open the box, staring at its contents in disbelief. It was completely filled with instruments of discipline and pleasure. At the very top of the pile was a letter with a seal, which Riki immediately handed to Iason without even looking. Iason broke the seal and opened the letter.

Iason,

Your box of toys as promised, per our little arrangement. The matter between us has been resolved—I believe to your satisfaction. I have something else of interest to you, if you are willing to pay another 50,000 credits. You might be able to guess what that is. Very interesting viewing, although I must warn you, you might find it somewhat disturbing. What a pretty pet you have, so dark and exotic, it's a wonder you can refrain from taking him yourself. I'm rather taken with his scream, just that right mix of pain and pleasure.

What did you think of my Aki?

Call me; let's go out for drinks and catch up on old times. Or if you prefer, just pay me and I'll release the footage.

Omaki

With a little laugh, Iason folded the letter, shaking his head. Omaki Ghan was incorrigible. It was just like him to taunt him with Riki's torture footage by suggesting that his pet had enjoyed it. However, such titillation was completely unnecessary; he would of course acquire the footage, if only to see exactly what Raoul had done, and wondered why he had not thought of doing so himself.

Riki pulled out a long, phallic implement with raised bumps on its surface and switched it on. It began vibrating. Giggling, the mongrel changed the settings to see what else it would do, then dropped it, yelping.

"Ouch! That fucking hurt! It...shocked me or something."

Iason chuckled. "What setting did you have it on?"

"Huh?" He picked it up carefully by the end and checked. "Oh. Shock." Grinning sheepishly, he tried another setting: G-wave. "I don't feel anything," he complained.

"That's because it doesn't go in your hand, pet."

Riki scowled at him, shutting the device off and tossing it aside, and peering in the box. "Ooo," he breathed, picking up a roundish, thin paddle. "Can I paddle you with this? It doesn't look too bad, right?"

"We'll see."

"Tease," he muttered.

Next he discovered what looked like a chain-mesh bikini with open areas for the genital and anal regions. It looked too small for Iason, so he tossed it aside.

"Let me see that," his master ordered, smiling.

"I'm not wearing it," Riki asserted.

"We'll see about that." Iason examined the bikini with amusement; he couldn't wait to make his pet don it.

Now the mongrel pulled out another outfit that was obviously designed for him—a skimpy mesh short and tank top set, the top looking far too small to provide adequate coverage, in his view. Once again he attempted to toss this aside and was intercepted by Iason, who immediately demanded that he put it on.

“Why don’t I just walk around naked, if you’re having me wear that?” Riki demanded.

“Put it on. Now.”

Sighing, the mongrel pulled off his shirt and pants, irritated, and put on the new outfit. “You’ve got to be fucking kidding,” he despaired, realizing that the mesh offered no coverage whatsoever to certain regions.

“Very appealing. You’ll wear that for the rest of the day.” Iason loved the look of his pet so attired, his midriff bare and the mesh shorts riding low on his hips, revealing the enticing hollows of Riki’s abdomen.

“What!”

“No arguments, pet. That’s final.”

Sighing dramatically, Riki continued exploring Omaki’s box. Next he picked up a formidable looking paddle, quickly attempting to hide it back inside the box.

“Pet.” The Blondie snapped his fingers, holding out his hand.

Reluctantly, Riki surrendered the paddle to his master, who examined it with delight.

“Oh my. An emission paddle.” Iason turned the paddle around in his hands, smiling. “With intensity settings. Ohhhh,” he laughed brokenly. “You’d better behave yourself now, Riki.”

“Uh huh.” The mongrel shot him a bored look, feigning indifference.

Next he pulled out a kasey-whip. Nervously, he tipped it on its end to read the class number. C-21. C-21? Was there even such a model? “I thought C-20 killed you. So what does C-21 do, bring you back to life?”

“Ah, a C-21, is it? My, my. And I thought those were banned.”

“What could it possibly do that’s worse than a C-20?” Riki demanded. “And the C-20’s not banned?”

“The C-21s come from Alpha Zen, part of the G-wave line specially designed for eunuchs. As it punishes it stimulates—much like the G-strap.”

“You mean it could make a Furniture horny?”

“So it’s said. But if it’s used on a non-eunuch, the damage to sexual function is irreparable. It’s the equivalent of castration, only without organ removal.”

“Why the hell is it in the box!” Riki yelled, mortified. “What if you had used it by mistake?”

“Calm down, pet. This is Omaki’s little joke. He knows perfectly well I’d check the class number—all of the Elites know about our little mishap.”

“His sense of humor sucks,” he grumbled, adding, “That IS worse than a C-20.”

Now he pulled out some ropes and gags, and several vials of oil, nodding approvingly. “Cool,” he breathed, as he examined the intricate swirling design on a beautiful, red and black taming stick. Suddenly realizing what he held, he again attempted to hide it back in the box.

“Riki.”

Sighing, he relinquished the taming stick to Iason, who waited with outstretched hand.

“Magnificent.” His master turned the taming stick over in his hands, marveling over the beauty of its craftsmanship. The design was certainly Urasian, like his MXV Emperor, similarly studded with gems—onyx and ruby. The gems projected a bit from the surface of the stick, which would increase the pain of each blow. Most likely a Xeronian import.

“This probably goes with it,” Riki said, tossing him a taming belt—a black leather belt with the same design, and several large inlaid rubies.

Iason stood up and removed his old taming belt, then tried on the new one, sliding the taming stick smoothly into the sheath. He nodded his approval.

“What do you think, pet?” He put his hands on his hips, waiting for Riki’s feedback.

“Mmmm.” Riki found the new taming stick less alluring when it hung threateningly against his master’s thigh.

"This must be worth at least 30,000 credits," Iason mused, puzzled. Why would Omaki extort so much from him and then send him such expensive gifts?

The buzz of the door interrupted his thoughts.

"Ah. They've arrived. Pet, put all that away. You can finish looking through it later."

"Who's arrived?"

"My new bodyguards."

"Body...guards?" Riki slowly refilled the box, looking up at Iason questioningly.

"Yes, Riki. What happened last night will never happen again."

Iason walked toward the door. "Wait." This single word uttered by his voice prevented the door from automatically opening at his approach. "Identify yourself," he commanded, speaking into the intercom.

"Odi Nunnda, and Freyn and Askel Ursath. Your new bodyguards."

The door slid open, admitting the two men—both of whom were extraordinarily tall, and formidable in size.

"You should have made us prove our identity with a scan," Odi said.

"I know. But...I expected you."

"That makes no difference," Freyn said, shaking his head. "An enemy could have quite a bit of knowledge about who you're expecting and exactly when, and then arrive in the guise of an expected guest. We'll scan your place for taps and cams, but someone could always use remote microphones to listen in."

"You need a visual board as well. We'll have one installed right away." Askel examined the door panel, hands on hips. "I'm surprised you haven't seen to that already. After the Agatha incident you told us about."

Iason nodded. "Whatever you need to secure these premises."

The men nodded, grimly, arms across their chests or on their hips—a formidable crew.

Riki watched all this with fascination. His master had acquired bodyguards? Because of what had happened to him? Two of the men looked somewhat similar, and he guessed they were brothers. They looked strong and uncompromising, but not unfriendly. The third man—Odi, was almost frighteningly dark and menacing. Not someone you would want to fuck around with.

Iason led them into the house. “I’ll show you to your rooms. I want at least one of you guarding the entrance at all times.”

“Two of us will guard,” Odi replied. “Except when you venture out. Then two of us will accompany you and the third will remain. In my view a fourth man would be better. That way two of us would always be here whenever you go out.”

“I’ll see to it.” The Blondie accessed the guest wing panel to open all the doors to the suites, then entered the corridor, gesturing to the selection of rooms. “Take your pick. All available except this one,” he pointed to Enyu’s room, “and...the last room on the right.”

Riki was now beside himself with excitement. “Ias—Master, can I have a new room, too?” he asked hopefully, tugging on his bodysuit.

Iason smiled. “Yes, pet. That is what I meant to tell you before. If you had just waited, I fully intended to allow you to choose a new room.”

Beaming, Riki ran down the hall, trying to get a glimpse of each room before the bodyguards made their selections. “What about this one?” he asked, pointing to the very room that Iason had said was off-limits.

“Not that one, pet.”

“Why not?”

“No more questions.”

Wisely obeying his master’s mandate, Riki then turned to the other side of the hall, the last room on the left. He could immediately tell from the layout it was the room he wanted; the interior was done in a sort of ancient motif, looking like the interior of an ancient Urasian longhouse with modern Xeronian technology.

“This one!” he yelled.

“Lower your voice,” Iason scolded, but smiled at his pet’s enthusiasm. Riki dashed into the room to explore its posh features.

The suite was large—the size of an apartment. It was equipped with a bar and a full kitchen, thick, soft carpet, and a full-sized bath with a sunken tub, as well as a separate shower. The bedroom walls were paneled in dark, knotty wood, and hung with tapestries depicting various erotic acts.

“Fuck yes,” he breathed, excited.

He dashed into the living area, thrilled with the dark leather furniture. The arms and legs of the chairs ended in small monstrous heads with gaping mouths. Running his hand on the soft leather with a sigh, he leapt onto the sofa, relishing its luxurious comfort. Then his eyes moved to the foot table, made of an immense shield with a glass top. On it was a holograph projector.

“Yes!” He immediately switched it on, enjoying the sight of two young pets copulating in the middle of the room. If he could just get Iason to remove his ring restrictions, he could sit in his room and masturbate all day.

With satisfaction he realized that his room was much better than Enyu’s. It was bigger, it had a sunken bath, the décor was cooler, the kitchen was full-sized.

Iason entered, observing his pet’s delight with pleasure. “So, do you like it, Riki?”

“It’s fucking awesome!”

“What did you think of the billiard room?”

“Billiard room?” Riki sat up, surprised.

The Blondie moved toward a door he had assumed was a closet, opening it to reveal another room with comfortable-looking furniture scattered about and a billiard table in the middle of the room.

“Would you like me to teach you to play?” Iason asked.

“Hmphf,” Riki snorted. “You teach me? I’ll have you know I’m known as the best pool-player in Ceres.”

“Is that so? Then...we’ll most definitely have to...make a pool date, sometime.”

This reminded his pet of another matter that had been bugging him. "Iason, can we fill the pools?" Riki pleaded. "Please? I need more exercise...you want me to look good, right?"

"Very well," his master replied, deciding a little exercise would be good for his pet.

"Awesome!" The mongrel jumped up, flinging his arms around Iason's neck and jumping up to kiss him.

Iason laughed, thrilled with his pet's affection.

"I got the best room, didn't I?" Riki's eyes shone.

"I knew this would be the one you picked."

"What's wrong with that room across the hall?"

Now Iason's face grew solemn, almost sad. "Leave it alone, pet," he whispered, eyes averted.

Riki stared at his master, perplexed. Had something happened in that room that Iason did not want to remember? He had never seen his Blondie master look so downcast. The room...was it why the guest wing had been sealed off for so long?

"Hey." Riki put his arms around Iason, holding him; Iason returned his embrace, sighing.

* * *

Katze was surprised to see two men standing outside the penthouse when he returned. They nodded at him, seeming to know who it was.

"Katze," one said, gruffly.

"You are?"

"Freyn...and this is Askel. We're the new bodyguards." They stepped aside and allowed Katze to put his hand on the scanner, opening the door.

Katze nodded. "Good." A little late...but better now than never.

"How did you know me?"

Freyn pulled a flip-pad projector out of his pocket and turned it on, projecting Katze's 3-dimensional image into the corridor. Next came Riki's image, but then Freyn shut the unit off.

“Oh. Impressive. Night.”

The brothers nodded almost imperceptibly as Katze entered the penthouse. He felt safer just knowing they were there and wondered why Iason hadn't acquired bodyguards earlier.

Iason was waiting for him, whip in hand. The mere sight of the Blondie sent a shiver through him, although Katze could tell the opiates he had taken were starting to kick in. His eyes were drawn to the T-stand that had been rolled into the great hall. So. He was to be restrained.

Katze was trembling. Truly, he had never been more frightened of anything than he was about what was about to happen.

“Do you need to relieve yourself before we begin?” Iason asked.

“No.”

“Get undressed.”

“Completely?”

“Yes, Katze.”

Katze swallowed, feeling a little embarrassed to show his body to Iason, who had never seen him fully nude. He undressed slowly.

“Riki! Enyu!”

“Are they...watching?”

“Yes.”

With a sinking feeling, he watched the pets amble into the hall, both of them stopping to stare at him. Katze refused to cower, and stood, back straight, his eunuch status proudly displayed. What he didn't know is that both Riki and Enyu regarded him with admiration, marveling over his impressive physique, which ironically was extraordinarily masculine in every way except one.

Iason glanced at him briefly but was preoccupied with steeling himself for Katze's punishment.

“Sit down, pets,” he commanded.

Riki immediately made a beeline for Iason's chair, which was the most comfortable chair in the hall. Enyu was forced to take a seat off to the side and resented having the second-best seat.

“Hold out your arm,” Iason ordered, then secured Katze's wrist in an upper cuff of the T-stand.

Without waiting to be asked, Katze held out his other arm, which Iason similarly cuffed.

“Leg.” Iason knelt down, cuffing his ankle to the T-stand. Again Katze dutifully offered the other limb without being asked. After adjusting the width of the leg restraints from spread-eagle to shoulder-width, Iason stepped back.

Retrieving his whip from under his belt where he had tucked it, the Blondie opened the command panel on the handle by pushing on the tongue of a gripping beast that ornamented the handsomely engraved handle.

When part of the handle raised and slid to reveal the panel, it was all Riki could do to keep from commenting on how cool the whip was. He wisely remained quiet; in fact, the hall was dead silent, as everyone waited for the whipping to begin. The bodyguards had been advised as to what was coming, and Odi had opted to watch the whipping from the balcony, where he stood, smoking.

“You have a choice, Katze. I can set this for Accelerator for less scarring and faster healing. But it will hurt far, far more.”

“Accelerator,” Katze replied without hesitating.

Iason raised an eyebrow, a little surprised, then programmed in the Accelerator emission setting.

On hearing his choice, Odi grinned. He liked this Katze...this man was no coward.

“Katze. You are about to be punished for an unforgivable transgression, sexual congress with my pet. Do you have anything to say before we begin?”

“I would like to say, Master Iason,” Katze said, boldly, “that it was fucking worth it. It had been a long time since I sucked anyone off and I enjoyed it.”

Riki was amused with this defiant reply in the face of punishment, as was Odi, who took a long drag on his cigarette to keep from laughing. Enyu watched the unfolding situation with joy as he realized the mean Furniture who had beat him with the taming stick was about to be whipped.

Iason stared thoughtfully at the handle of his whip, which he turned around slowly in his hands, the tiniest curl of his lip suggesting a smile. "I see. Let's see if you feel the same in about twenty minutes."

With that, he suddenly cracked his whip, startling Enyu, who yelped. Riki now sobered as Katze's punishment became imminent.

The Blondie began to pace, cracking the whip menacingly. "This sentence is nothing compared to what will happen if you dare touch my Riki again. Should you be so foolish, it will be the last thing you do. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Master Iason. It will not happen again."

"Good. It's time, Katze."

Katze closed his eyes, bracing himself, thankful for the opiates that were already in his system.

Iason took a step back, then rushed toward him, unleashing the force of the whip across his bare back. Katze screamed in agony, unable to help himself, as the whip tore into his flesh.

Pacing for a brief moment, Iason lunged forward and sent the whip flying again, and again...and again. Blood streamed from the gaping lash marks, and Katze felt he would die from the pain. It was too much.

Riki watched the whipping in horror. This was his doing. He had solicited Katze's sex—and yet Katze was the one who was truly paying for it. Iason was certainly not holding back, and a whip in the Blondie's angry hand was proving to be a formidable combination. Although Iason had seemed rather impassive and cool-headed before the punishment began, Riki knew that he was now angry, that the whipping had somehow tapped into buried rage of some kind. He could tell this by the hard line of his mouth, and by the sharp flick of his wrist as he cracked the whip threateningly, and by the fury with which he released his blows.

Iason was, in fact, furious. Katze's defiant comment ate away at him, and once he became angry, he was no longer able to separate this punishment from what had happened that afternoon at the penthouse between Katze, Riki and Daryl. Deep inside, Iason felt he

had never really punished Katze adequately for that transgression, despite his broken ribs and other injuries. Now, his naked body became a canvas on which to express his rage, and Iason's whip, the artist's brush. The sight of Riki on top of Katze tormented him, and he whipped Katze as hard as he could, eliciting unworldly screams from the miserable youth.

And then, silence.

Worried, Riki slid from his chair and approached Iason, tugging on his sleeve. "Please, Master. Please stop."

"Back to your seat, Riki!" Iason answered, sharply.

"Punish me. I'm the one who asked for it. He's...I'm afraid you might kill him, Master. I think he's passed out."

Katze was, in fact, unconscious, and he was also bleeding profusely. Iason realized then that his pet was right. In his fury, he had gone too far. Tossing the whip aside, he freed him from his restraints, carrying his limp and bloody body to Daryl's room.

With a loud moan, Katze stirred in Iason's arms, his eyes fluttering open, focusing with fear and confusion on the Blondie's face.

"It's over. You've taken your punishment."

Eyes rolling back, Katze passed out again.

Riki rushed to get the medical kit, and then joined his master, who was positioning Katze gently on the bed. Together they worked to clean him up, and once they had wiped up all the blood, and cleaned the wounds, Riki picked up a can of accelerator.

"He wanted me to apply this. I want to do it now while he's out."

Nodding, Iason moved aside while Riki applied the stinging spray, but Katze did not even stir.

"Something's wrong," Iason murmured. "He shouldn't be—"

A low groan from the punished youth was greeted with smiles of relief from Iason and Riki. Katze's eyes opened and then shut again.

“He’ll be okay...he’ll be sore as hell, but he’ll be okay.” As Iason rose to leave, Riki motioned to the bed. “I’m gonna stay with him awhile.”

“Don’t stay too long. We have business in the bedroom.”

“Like I’d forget that? I’ll be out in a bit—and we’re doing it in MY room tonight.”

“As you wish, Master Riki.” With a mock bow, his master left his pet to contemplate the evening ahead.

The first thing he would do is finish going through Omaki’s box.

Iason's Penthouse

Biting his lip to keep from laughing, Iason stole into the penthouse, anxious to give Raoul a little surprise. He wasn't expected back so soon, but his trip to Urus had been truncated by a small uprising outside the convention center.

It was time for some payback for all Raoul's little pranks, like the time he slipped a live panther lizard into his glass of wine, or when he switched the connection codes on the command center so that he called Jupiter rather than Raoul, much to his mortification--and her delight.

The penthouse was dark; evidently Raoul and Ambassador Anori were both already asleep. He slipped into the bedroom, surprised to find it empty, the bed still made. A muffled laugh caught his attention and he froze, confused. It came from...the observatory?

Katze approached him then, barefoot, attired only in his loose pajama bottoms. His adolescent charm was announced with a formidable yawn and glazed-over eyes that appeared to still be dreaming. "You're back early, Master." His voice was raspy from sleep. "Do you...need anything?"

"Where's Raoul?"

"Um. Master. You...should know something," Katze hedged, running his hand through his hair as he tried to think how to tell him. He had been watching Raoul and Anori flirt for days and was wise enough to know their interactions were inappropriate, to say the least. "About Sir Raoul. And...Ambassador Anori."

The Blondie studied him, and Katze's eyes told him everything.

“Impossible.” Now Iason made for the spiral staircase that led to the observatory, heart pounding. His temples pulsed as they only did when he was stressed. Each step he took made him a little angrier than the step before as the unmistakable sounds of lovemaking became more distinct.

Finally he reached the top of the stairs. The doorway was open, and there, in the hot tub, was Raoul...with Ambassador Anori Khosi, engaged in coitus. Anori was bent over the edge of the tub--Raoul's favorite position--and Raoul was taking him with shameless enthusiasm. Both of them were glistening wet, the fire in the old-fashioned hearth casting everything in an erotic glow. Overhead the night sky was clear, stars bright and glittering, the rising twin moons full and swollen orange-red like ripe forbidden fruit.

“You feel so good,” Raoul averred, running a hand down Anori's back, then wrapping his long dark hair around his arm.

“I want it harder,” Anori hissed. “Harder, Raoul!”

Groaning, Raoul obliged him, thrusting violently.

“That's it!”

“Spread your legs more!” Raoul demanded, assisting this project with his knees, and then his hands to spread him more. “Oh yes...beautiful!”

“Raoul,” Anori moaned. He had never been so exquisitely taken in his life. Raoul's gorgeous thighs flexed with each thrust, hypnotizing him as he twisted around to watch his acquisition. It was all too much; closing his eyes, he began his ascent, lips parting, his gasps becoming urgent cries as Raoul began grunting and growling.

As for Raoul, his lust for the exotic dignitary from Alpha Zen had clouded his reason and blinded him to what he was jeopardizing. He knew he was being unfaithful, but with Iason gone his needs were mounting, and Anori's seduction was intoxicating. The Ambassador had taunted him by throwing off his robe and then making for the observatory, naked, looking back over his shoulder and raising an eyebrow, his lip curling into a naughty smile. Raoul had followed like a predator after his young prey, knowing, as he

disrobed and joined Anori in the hot tub, that the outcome could only be one thing: a thoroughly delicious fuck. All he could think about was sinking into Anori's depths; he never once seriously considered the consequences.

Iason felt as though his heart had stopped. He simply stood, watching the copulation of Raoul and Anori in complete disbelief, hurt, and rage. Unable to speak or even move, he witnessed what no lover should ever see--his betrayal in progress.

The illicit union was now celebrated with the sex cries of the young lovers as they climaxed, almost in perfect unison. It was a sound that would forever haunt Iason. Backing up, he crept down the stairs, trying to still his mind. A thousand thoughts whispered as the disturbing images of their congress replayed again and again; Iason felt as if his world had been cut into pieces.

And he felt...rage. The wrath that only a betrayed lover feels...an all-consuming fury that demands retribution.

He would have his blood-vengeance.

With deliberate stealth, he stole to Anori's room, overriding the lock codes to gain access. Then...he waited.

* * *

Groaning, Katze opened his eyes, confused when he realized he was in Daryl's room. The last thing he remembered was Iason's face...and before that, the unbelievable hell of his whipping. Now he was lying facedown, and his back...he groaned again, overcome with excruciating pain.

Riki crouched down next to him, smiling. "You're still alive. I was a little worried there for a moment."

"Please...fucking kill me," he whispered.

"Can't do it. Daryl would have a little fit and chain me up again."

"It's...unbearable."

Now Riki leaned in close. "Where's your stash? I know you have something."

“In the closet. Daryl’s housecoat--right pocket. Get me a Seven.”

Grinning, Riki went to explore Katze’s hoard of contraband, locating the Opiate-7 with amazement. “I thought these were banned,” he marveled. “I didn’t even know you could still find these.”

“If it’s out there...I can find it,” Katze gasped. “Hurry up.”

“Are you sure this won’t kill you? Because if you overdose Iason will attach a permanent spanking device to my ass.”

Katze chuckled weakly. “Riki...I pop ‘em all the time, just for kicks.”

“Ooo. Aren’t you the tough one.” Riki shook his head at Katze’s rashness, wondering what Daryl thought of his recreational forays. “I’ll get you a drink.”

“Don’t need it. Just stick it in my mouth.”

“Now that’s what got you into this mess in the first place,” Riki quipped.

“Smartass.” Katze smiled, then winced. “Fucking hurry up.”

Riki gave him the opiate, nodding when he swallowed it with ease. “Impressive. No wonder you were so good.”

Katze answered this with a groan, his back starting to throb.

“So do you still think it was worth it, sucking me off?”

“Hell no,” Katze snorted. “Don’t think for a minute I really meant that, you little brat.”

“I was gonna say. Because what would Daryl think?”

“I just wanted to go down with some dignity.”

Riki smiled, remembering Katze’s eleventh hour defiance with admiration. “That you did. It was fucking brilliant. You should have seen Iason’s face when you said that. You know how he gets that little eerie smile when he’s really mad. He was pissed as hell.”

“So I gathered. I thought he would fucking kill me.”

“He almost did. I saved you, by the way.”

“Don’t expect any rewards, dumbass--you already got yours.”

Riki laughed. “I know. If anything I should be sucking you off.”

Katze sighed dramatically. "Here we go. Rubbing it in again. But it's just as well I can't accept your offer. I'm taken, you know."

"How's Daryl?" Riki asked, suddenly recollecting that Katze had visited him.

"Better, actually. He'll be released in two days."

"Does that mean you'll be leaving?" Riki was a little disappointed, although he was anxious to see Daryl.

"Not for awhile. He'll need to rest, so I'll be here while he's recovering."

"Oh. I see," Riki said, grinning, "and my guess is he'll have a very long recovery while you're staying in his bed."

Katze laughed at this. He was starting to feel...much better.

"It's kicking in, isn't it?"

"Oh yes."

"Oh! You fucking missed it. Cat-boy really got it today. Iason spanked him raw--you should have heard him howl!"

"Mmmm," Katze smiled.

"You're getting sleepy?"

"Yeah." Then he perked up. "The accelerator, Riki."

"Did it."

"Yeah?" Katze sighed, closing his eyes and drifting off into poppy-filled dreamscapes.

Riki reached down and brushed the hair from Katze's eyes. He looked at his whipped backside, shivering. From his back down to his thighs, his skin was torn with the fruits of Iason's fury, lash marks that cut deep into the beautiful youth's flesh. He admired Katze for insisting on acceleration despite its mind-numbing pain and hoped, for his sake, that he would escape massive scarring. Daryl would not care, he knew--but Katze would.

Rising, he went out to smoke, heading for the pool area. As he approached, he became excited by the sound of water--Iason was having the pools filled as he had promised. Stepping out onto the balcony, he was pleasantly surprised by the gurgling of the fountains, which had been turned on. Already a tiny orange miramer had found the fountain and was taking a bath, shaking its

beautiful plumage in the fresh water. A stone bench beneath an awning that extended from the roof captured his interest, and he sat down, staring at the waning moons, golden crescents suspended in the curtain of darkness, the new moon only two days away.

He lit a smoke and enjoyed the view. The stars filled the sky like glittering crystals, and Riki studied them, trying to find a constellation he knew. Icaria was the one Guy had taught him, and now he scanned the sky, searching for it.

“Are you looking for something, pet?” Iason asked, softly.

“Bloody hell,” Riki yelled, startled. “You’re too damned quiet. You should wear a fucking bell or something.”

“That would defeat the purpose of spying on you. What are you looking for?”

“This one constellation...Icaria.”

Iason looked up and immediately pointed to it. “See the five stars in a straight line, and then the cluster of stars above it? Work your way up from there.”

“I see it! That’s it!! The one with the huge hard-on!”

The Blondie chuckled, sitting down next to him and crossing his legs gracefully.

“It’s really nice out here, Iason. Oh! Thanks for filling the pools. I can’t wait to go for a swim. These fountains...are really cool. I saw a little...orange bird.”

“An orange miramer. They only sing at night.”

“It was taking a bath in one of the fountains. And what’s this for?” Riki pointed to a depression on the deck that was a few feet deep. “It looks like a bathtub.”

“A pond. I used to keep koi and kruska in it.”

“Can we fill it?” Riki asked, excited. “And put fish in it?”

“The landscapers are coming tomorrow. They’ll bring plants and fill up the pond.” Iason had decided that if the guest wing was going to be in use, he would restore it to its original glory; it had been nothing short of a little paradise, almost an enchanted garden, and he had to admit that he missed it. And although he still felt keenly when he thought about what had happened, it was time that

he learned to move on. He had long since forgiven Raoul, and now he needed to forgive...himself.

"This is fucking awesome out here. Why did you keep all this sealed up so long?"

Iason remained silent, averting his eyes.

Sensing that he had once again touched a sensitive subject, Riki quickly shifted gears. "I thought you were gonna kill Katze."

"His punishment fit his crime," Iason replied, firmly, studying the stars.

"So, that's it? His punishment fit his crime...that's all you're going to say?"

Now the Blondie turned to him, staring at him with such dark, angry intensity that Riki instinctively flinched.

"Riki. What happened that night at Serendipity...and later at the penthouse...can never happen again. If it does, I don't care who it is. He will die screaming." Iason's eyes glittered cold, like frozen ice over a mourning sea.

Shivering, the mongrel made no reply, his eyes locked with Iason's for an endless moment. He had no doubt that Iason's threat was real.

"So you see, pet. It's up to you. If you ever solicit another man's sex, you are sending him to his death."

For a long time neither of them spoke. Iason's gaze was steady, unwavering, communicating all his anger and pain over Riki's illicit congress with Katze.

Riki tossed his smoke and empty pack over the ledge, sighing. "You know, Iason, sometimes...you can be a bit...intense. What you need is a good fucking." Now he smiled, resting his hand on the Blondie's thigh and then caressing him. "And I'm just the man to do it."

Immediately responding to his touch, Iason relaxed, smiling.

"We're going to go into my room and finish looking through that box. And after that I have all sorts of plans for you, my naughty Blondie."

With that he pulled Iason toward him for a long, languid kiss, running his hands through the Blondie's heavenly soft, fragrant hair.

Sliding his hand up Iason's thigh, Riki ascertained his readiness, encouraging his arousal with the palm of his hand. Breaking away, the mongrel gifted him with a drop-dead sexy, seductive stare, sending Iason's heart pattering fast.

With a half smile, Riki smacked Iason's thigh with authority. "Let's go."

* * *

Raoul spent the day drifting in and out of sleep, oscillating between pain and ecstasy as one opiate wore off and another set in. The pain was worse now than it had been when he was first punished, it seemed; his body throbbed and ached and stung and burned. He was sweating, his metabolism accelerated from his injuries naturally, and additionally from the accelerator Yui had applied.

As he moved into awareness, he was comforted by Yui's touch, the cool cloth he placed so gently on his brow, his slow, soothing strokes as he brushed out his hair, something Raoul absolutely adored.

And there was an erotic dream involving Yui...he saw the beautiful youth kneeling before him, pleasuring him with his mouth and tongue...and then, as Raoul reached a higher state of consciousness, he remembered that it had not been a dream, but that Yui had submitted fully and eagerly to his demands.

But there were nightmares, too. Iason standing over him with a whip, and pain--lots of pain. He saw a paddle...felt its excruciating blows...and there was burning...and so much blood, Iason's hands covered with it, his bodysuit drenched, and Anori wasn't moving. Headmaster Konami's belt ate into his flesh; he tried not to cry out, but his mouth opened without his will. Iason cried out, too, with every strike. And then he had Iason pinned to the billiard table, sinking into him...and they were in the hot tub...Iason over the

ledge...his long dark hair wrapped around his arm...Anori Khosi, the lovely Anori, like an exotic fruit that needed plucking...broken and cold, bloody and sweet...burning, searing pain...the mongrel screamed out exquisitely with every strike of the paddle, begging and pleading...so tight, his flesh torn as Raoul shafted him mercilessly...and somehow the Interceptor hadn't worked...a pox on that fucking Omaki Ghan.

He groaned, thrashing in his bed, then opened his eyes.

"There now." Yui comforted him by stroking his brow. "Turn back onto your stomach."

Raoul pulled him down onto the bed, holding him, ignoring the pain of pressure on his back. Yui trembled in his arms.

* * *

"Can I get you a drink?" Riki offered with affected nonchalance, secretly thrilled with his new private bar.

"Wine would be lovely, my darling Riki."

Giving him a bewildered look at the new appellation "darling," the mongrel proceeded to open his cabinets, searching for a bottle of wine.

"You do realize, pet, that you are only allowed ONE drink each evening, and only after 8:00, just as before?"

"Yeah, yeah." Riki scowled. Here he was trying to play the host, and already Iason was thrusting reality into his little fantasy. "Here we go!" He pulled out a bottle of wine, peering at it, then whistling. "This stuff is...over twenty years old!" He held up a bottle of White Moon, grinning. "Isn't this your favorite?"

"A very fine wine. Not my favorite."

His pet frowned. "What's your favorite?"

"A wine that comes from Aristia. Red Emperor. Very difficult to come by."

"Oh." Riki's disappointment was so obvious that Iason laughed.

“White Moon is my third favorite, after Icarian Amber, also rather rare.” He smiled. “A glass of White Moon would be heavenly, love.”

Now Riki stared at the top of the bottle, perplexed, wondering what to do next.

Iason laughed. “What, have you never opened a wine bottle before?”

“No, we didn’t get a lot of fancy White Icarian Emperor crap in the slums.”

Smiling, Iason rose from his chair and joined him at the bar. “As my pet, you need to know how to open a bottle of wine,” he said, his voice silky smooth. “Open that drawer there and find the corkscrew.”

Picking up the strange-looking instrument, Riki grinned. “Bet this could do some damage...somewhere.”

Standing behind him, Iason took hold of his hands, guiding him. “You put the tip in, like this. Push here...and then firmly press these levers down...like this.”

With a soft pop, the cork was extracted.

“Cool! I’m opening it next time.”

Now Iason pressed his body up against Riki’s, bending to nuzzle his cheek and then gently kiss his neck.

Setting the bottle on the bar counter, the beautiful mongrel closed his eyes, his body seeming to melt with Iason’s mere touch. The Blondie wrapped his arms around him, then reached down to fondle him.

“Hold on.” Riki grabbed his hand, pushing him away. “Not yet. I want to finish going through Omaki’s box.”

“As you wish, pet,” the Blondie whispered, “but don’t make me wait too long. I’m anxious for you.”

“You’ll just have to wait, won’t you? Now sit down,” he commanded.

Amused with his pet’s domineering manner, Iason humored him, returning to his chair to wait, somewhat impatiently, for the evening’s diversions to begin.

After pouring Iason a glass of wine--a bit of bourbon for himself--Riki joined him on the sofa to explore the contents of the box.

First he dug through the box until he found the bondage cords he'd already discovered, showing them to Iason with a glint in his eyes. "You're getting tied up tonight."

The Blondie answered this with a little smile, enjoying Riki's enthusiasm.

"And I'm using this," he asserted, holding up the stimulator he'd experimented with the previous day.

When Iason did not object, Riki added it to the bondage cords, grinning.

Next the mongrel pulled out a flogger, its black leather tails tipped with tiny beads. "How about this?" he asked, hopefully.

Iason gave him a look that conveyed his contempt for Riki having even suggested it. "Certainly not."

Annoyed, Riki tossed it aside. "I bet you'll use it on ME though," he grumbled.

"Not if you obey me, pet," came Iason's silky smooth reply, as he sipped on his wine.

The mongrel rolled his eyes, as though this wasn't even an option.

"Ooo! Nipple torture!" Riki held up two formidable looking clips, snapping them open and shut menacingly. "Please?"

"Very well," the Blondie agreed. "Just this once."

Thrilled to have his master's consent for something else from Omaki's box of salacious toys, Riki put the clips aside on the foot table, adding to what he hoped would become a much larger pile.

Next he pulled out a large collar and leash, grinning. "This looks way too big for me."

Iason shook his head at Omaki's sense of humor. "All right, pet."

Victorious, the mongrel added the collar to the pile.

“What about this?” Riki held up a rather innocuous-looking strap which the mongrel knew first-hand would be much more painful than it appeared.

The Blondie nodded, uncrossing his legs. He was becoming a bit impatient, his arousal starting to mount. His pet added the strap to his pile, trying to hide his excitement.

“Oh! And this!” Riki pulled out a long, wicked-looking Headmaster’s cane.

“No, Riki.”

As he attempted to toss it aside, Iason held out his hand. “Pet,” he demanded, snapping his fingers. The mongrel relinquished the cane reluctantly, slamming it into his master’s waiting hand.

“Ohhh,” Iason laughed brokenly. “Watch yourself, Riki.”

“What are these?” His pet puzzled over several suede cords with beaded tassels.

“Hair ties. For braids.”

Completely uninterested, Riki threw these over his shoulder, now discovering a skimpy leather outfit of straps and buckles, seductively open at critical areas. He jumped up, excited when he realized it was Blondie-sized.

“Put this on,” he commanded, throwing it at Iason, who let it land untouched on his lap as he sipped his wine.

“Enough. Let’s get on with it, Riki.”

Riki put his hands on his hips. “Obey me or suffer the consequences.”

Chuckling, the Blondie put down his glass, then undressed, examining the outfit with confusion until he discovered how it was to be worn. It was composed of leather straps fastened together with buckles and provided little coverage, revealing mostly his skin as well as his genitals and buttocks. He silently cursed Omaki as he struggled to get it on, feeling ridiculous in it.

Riki was absolutely thrilled, finding Iason unbelievably sexy and pet-like. He grinned at his master’s developing erection. “Now this.” He tossed him the collar with the leash.

"You do realize, pet," the Blondie warned as he donned the wanted prop, "that next week everything will be back to normal."

"Yeah, yeah," Riki said dismissively. He was perfectly aware of this, which was why he planned to do everything he could while he had the chance. Pointing toward the bedroom, he issued his next command. "Get in there. Now."

"As you wish, Master Riki," Iason played along, slowly walking toward the bedroom, unknowingly giving his pet an enticing view of his firm ass erotically framed with strips of leather.

Adjusting himself after a sudden surge to his loins, Riki gathered his toys and followed Iason, closing the door behind them.

The Blondie looked to him for instruction.

"Turn around," Riki ordered, then tied Iason's wrists tightly behind his back. "Okay now. Sit on the edge of the bed."

Iason obeyed, sucking in his breath a little when Riki attached the clips to his nipples. The mongrel observed his master's growing erection with dismay. "This is supposed to hurt...are you getting off on this?" he demanded, hand on hip, his other hand gripping the leash.

The Blondie laughed then, unable to keep a straight face when confronted with his pet's indignation. "I am sorry, pet. It is not a response I can...control."

"MASTER Riki," he corrected. "You're MY pet tonight."

"Of course, Master Riki." Iason tried his best to regain his composure, but found his pet so adorable he was ready to burst.

"Oh, you think this is funny? I know what. Let's see how YOU like it when you're so turned on you're about to die...but don't get to come."

Making good on his threat, he emptied some of Omaki's oil onto his hand, then began applying it to Iason's already matured erection, eliciting gasps of delight from the aroused Blondie.

"Feels good, does it?" Now Riki intensified his strokes, speeding up just enough to get Iason excited without actually pushing him past his critical point.

Iason closed his eyes, enjoying the incredibly erotic sensation of being sexually tormented by his pet; the cords ate into his flesh and his nipples were starting to burn, but Riki's hand was relentless and pulled him where he wanted to be, he was almost there, yes, just a little bit more....

Suddenly, Riki let go, and simply stood there, grinning down at him with his arms across his chest. "How does THAT feel?"

"Keep going," he said, sharply, angry that Riki had brought him so close and then intentionally stopped.

"A little frustrated are we? You wouldn't care too much for a pet ring then, I think? I won't be taking orders from you this evening, PET, so get on your knees and bend over the bed." Riki picked up the strap, and snapped it between his hands with a mischievous smile.

For a moment Iason hesitated, tempted to call off the evening and just take Riki hard like he wanted to. But he had promised his pet seven nights. And after everything Riki had been through, he deserved it.

He found it a little awkward getting down on his knees with his wrists bound, and the mongrel did not help him, except to remove the clips from his nipples. Once he was in position, he turned to see that Riki was pacing behind him, the strap hanging down by his side, swaying as the mongrel flicked it in anticipation of disciplining him.

In fact, Riki was enjoying the view so much that he was contemplating skipping the discipline and going straight to the sex. The sight of Iason bound so submissively, his hair in soft tangles all over the bed, his ass positioned for discipline and conquest, sent blood rushing to his loins.

But he wasn't about to seriously give up an opportunity to release a little pent-up rage and frustration. Iason had punished him plenty...now it was time for some payback.

"Pet," he announced, "you're being punished just because I fucking feel like it." With that, he unleashed the strap on the Blondie's bare backside with an immensely satisfying snap.

Iason did not cry out, but he flinched, a little surprised at how much it hurt. When the second strike hit him, his lips parted, and with the third strike, he issued a breathy sound--barely audible, though Riki heard it, relishing it. Then he commenced with a thorough strapping, and it wasn't long before Iason began crying out and then put a halt to it.

"Enough, Riki."

Ignoring him at first, the mongrel continued his punishment, feeling it was unfair for Iason to have the option of cutting his punishment short when things got uncomfortable.

"Riki!" Now his tone was uncompromising, angry.

Reluctantly, he stopped, smiling at his handiwork. The Blondie's bottom and thighs were red with strap marks--he felt certain he had produced a few welts.

"When I say stop, you'll stop!" Iason snapped.

"Yeah, okay." Now Riki picked up the phallic-like stimulator toy and, after turning it on to the warm vibration setting, pressed it up against his portal, gently probing, penetrating slightly. "How's this?"

Iason closed his eyes, sighing. "Nice. Keep going."

"Like...this?" With gentle thrusts, Riki inserted the toy further into the Blondie, until finally he was almost fully inside.

"Mmmm."

"Let's try the G-wave setting," Riki suggested, playing with the panel on the end of the toy.

Iason yelped, then cried out, loudly.

"Oh shit," the mongrel muttered, fumbling to turn it off. "That was Shock."

"Riki!" Iason bellowed.

"It wasn't on purpose!"

"Take it out, now!"

"Wait...I promise you'll like it," Riki pleaded, managing to find the G-wave setting. "See?"

Relaxing, Iason now moaned, then shuddered, overcome with pleasurable sensations.

“There we go,” his pet whispered. “That feels good, right?”

“Yes,” Iason conceded. “Riki.”

“Yeah?”

“No more playing around. I need to come, so do...whatever you need to do...and then I'm taking you.”

“Oh all right. You're no fun,” the mongrel pouted, although he was so aroused he was about ready to stain his pants. He pulled out the toy and tossed it aside. “Get up on the bed, facedown.”

“Help me up.”

Riki assisted Iason onto the bed, then stripped off his own clothes and straddled him, pushing his legs together with his knees. It was a perfect position of power and control; Iason bound and prostrate under him. Riki rode him hard although, not surprisingly, it was a short ride--the mongrel unable to contain himself once his master began his intoxicating anal squeeze.

“Oh fuck, I'm gonna come already,” he lamented, then ejaculated.

Unable to help himself, Iason began laughing.

“It's not fucking funny!” Furious, Riki withdrew and began spanking him, smacking his punished bottom as hard as he could, but the Blondie continued to laugh, just as amused by his pet's anger and attempt to spank him as he was by his usual rush to the finish line.

“Untie me now, Riki,” Iason said, finally managing to regain his composure. He was now quite anxious to tend to his own needs.

“I don't think this night should count,” his pet muttered, as he released him from his cords. “Anyway, I'll be right back. I gotta have a smoke.”

As Riki left the bedroom, still naked, and prepared to leave the suite, Iason suddenly grabbed him from behind.

“Where do you think you're going?”

“I told you. I need a fucking smoke.”

Now Iason pulled him close, whispering in his ear. “Don't you EVER walk away from me like that again, pet,” he said, voice

trembling. "When we are in the bedroom, you do not leave without my permission."

"I was coming right back," he protested. "Can we do this fast then?"

"Oh, you're in a hurry, is that it?" Suddenly Iason felt furious; he wasn't even sure why, except that when Riki had walked away from him without even asking about his needs, he had suddenly lost all patience with his pet. "You want the expedited version? Very well."

Now Iason pushed him towards a chair, thrusting him over it. "Bend over," he commanded, sharply, and before Riki could really even grab onto the arms of the chair, he plunged into him, hard, which his pet answered with an agonized scream.

"Oh fuck," he whimpered. "Please...that...really hurts, Iason!"

"I thought you wanted to do this fast?" Now the Blondie tore into him, furious, but still able to enjoy his barbaric fuck. The mongrel felt good, no question; there was simply no substitute for taking him without preparation. Riki's cries only stimulated him further. "How does THIS feel?" he taunted, imitating his pet's attitude from earlier that evening.

"It fucking hurts!"

"Isn't this what you wanted?" Iason grabbed onto his hips, sinking his nails into his flesh. "Isn't it?" Over his pet's whimpers, the Blondie's ascension began, and their vocalizations intertwined, the master's pleasure and his pet's pain, an extraordinarily erotic sound that was relished by Enyu, who had been masturbating in the hall outside Riki's door the entire evening.

Perhaps because of his heightened emotional state, or perhaps because he took Riki unprepared, Iason then experienced one of the best orgasms of his life, a release that left him gasping and shaking. As he withdrew, Riki shuddered, feeling blood and semen sting his torn insides.

"You may smoke now," Iason said, curtly.

Riki turned around, looking up into his eyes with a hurt look.

It was a look that pulled at his heart, and so he looked away, wanting to punish Riki a bit more.

Feeling certain that no apology was forthcoming, Riki opted to shake off the incident, a technique that had served him well since his childhood, protecting him time and again from the harsh embrace of an uncaring world. It was this ability that was his greatest strength, that had made him the leader of Bison. It had protected him from impossible heartache, and most of all, from the memory of being abandoned by his mother at the Ceres Nursery when he was just old enough to understand what she had done.

He ran a hand through his hair, studying Iason for a moment.

"You--don't tell me...you're still pissed? After you fucked me raw?" he teased, gently.

Iason smiled...a very slight smile, as he softened. "No pet. I am not angry." And at that precise moment it was suddenly inexplicably true. Riki stared up at him with such a breathtakingly sweet expression that Iason could not help but melt. "Riki," he sighed, closing his eyes. He wanted to say something comforting, to assemble some sort of apology, but could not quite bring himself to do so.

Riki sensed his shift in mood and pounced on it; he felt Iason's regret just as clearly as if the Blondie had said it, and he was not one to demand words where they were not needed. The mongrel pointed to his lips. "Kiss."

Obliging him, the Blondie bent down and kissed his lips, softly.

Riki sighed. "How come we never kiss anymore?"

Iason pulled him close and kissed him again. "Do you like kissing?" he whispered, thrilled with Riki's silent gift of forgiveness.

"Don't you?"

"Yes. Very much."

"Okay. New rule. No sex without kissing."

"Agreed." That night, master and pet put the new rule to good use, holding one another for hours as they explored one another through long, sensual kisses that dissolved all that had come between them.

* * *

Raoul had been awake for some time but continued to lay in bed, staring at Yui, who was still sound asleep, his tousled hair framing his serene face in charming disarray. The green-eyed youth had stayed with him the entire night, soothing him whenever his pain tormented him, and Raoul had enjoyed his warm touch and the comfort of his presence in his bed.

He studied Yui, replaying their sexual encounter over and over in his mind, and now desiring to take things a step further. But he wanted to clean up first and so quietly slipped out of bed; he was so aroused that he would have to release in the shower, but then he would be ready to pursue Yui later without feeling rushed.

The water was excruciating on his broken skin-at least at first. But once he became accustomed to it, his erection returned, and he pleased himself eagerly, his thoughts oscillating between Iason and Yui, but more towards Yui, who he now fully intended to ravish later that day. Steam rose from the hot water, filling the air. He stood, one hand pressed against the wall for support as he pumped himself without restraint, so aroused that he could no longer keep quiet, moaning and grunting as he ascended towards his critical point.

The fatal image was his penetration of Yui, which finally sent him over the edge, his semen shooting up erratically and dripping down his fingers as he groaned in ecstasy, water streaming down his face and body, his hair wet like coils of golden rope plastered to his back.

* * *

When Riki finally awoke, his bed was empty; the penthouse was abuzz with activity and noise. Creeping out of his room still naked, he dashed to the pool, thrilled to see that it was now full. He stared at the room in amazement; it had literally been transformed

overnight into a garden paradise. Potted plants and trees were everywhere, as well as exotic, brightly-colored flowers of all kinds. Scores of landscapers worked noisily, putting in the finishing touches, arguing over the placement of some of the larger pots which, now planted, proved difficult to move. Riki looked up, marveling at the fantastic butterflies that fluttered everywhere--wings that danced in blues, greens, and bright red and orange.

He shook his head, laughing. Iason had said only that the landscapers would "bring plants" and fill up the pond, not create an opulent garden fit for an emperor. Suddenly he remembered the pond, and started towards the balcony.

"Close the door or they'll get out," one man reprimanded, pointing up at the butterflies, and smirking a little at the mongrel's nakedness.

Riki shut the door behind him and then, ignoring the stares and snorting laughs of the landscapers, rushed to balcony, anxious to see if the second pool and Iason's pond had been filled.

When he opened the door, he gasped, completely overwhelmed.

He had never seen a garden more beautiful in his life. Towering trees with weeping boughs swayed majestically, pink and claret blossoms whirling hypnotically in the breeze. Against the penthouse arbors had been secured, on which climbing vines with magnificent blossoms crawled up on elegant trails of verdant green. The air was scented with lavender and jasmine; myriad flowers in stone and porcelain pots graced the garden with brightly colored blooms, open but for the aromatic night-waking flowers that emerged only under the pale light of the twin moons.

A dwarf orange tree hung with ripe fruit was situated near the stone bench, which was now softened with thick, inviting cushions. From the door to the pool and the bench, and then branching off to the balcony's ledge, a path of smooth russet-brown marble had been laid down. Incredibly, moss--transplanted on a bed of rich soil--now covered a shaded stretch of the balcony from the path's edge to the ledge, a large boulder situated in the middle of its lush jade carpet. The illusion was stunning, as though the moss was growing

out of the balcony floor. Murmuring fountains were jealously guarded by indigo-blue and yellow finches, and the pond was filled with colorful koi and kruska tiger-fish, immense crimson lotus flowers peeking up from the water's tranquil surface. In the boughs of an Aristian pear tree a sharlingale was singing, as enamored of his newfound sanctuary as the gaping pet of Iason Mink.

And...the pool was now full, ornamented with wayward weeping blossoms of pink and cherry-wine, gentle boats of fragile beauty that floated on ripples of cool aquamarine, while chimes tinkled soothingly, caressed by the wind's touch. Eagerly, he started toward the pool, startled when he felt a sharp smack on his bottom.

"Get dressed," Iason scolded. "Didn't you see the landscapers?"

"You scared the fucking shit out of me!" Riki cried, rubbing his ass.

"You need to close the door behind you. You've just let out one of the dragontails." Iason pointed to a vivid blue butterfly that had made his escape, now fortuitously distracted by the lavender bush, thus allowing the Blondie to capture him.

"Can I hold it?"

Iason smiled. "Hold out your hand."

Carefully transferring the desperately struggling butterfly to his hands, the Blondie smiled at the delight on his pet's face.

"It tickles," he giggled, squealing as the tiny captive attempted to flee his new prison.

"Take it back inside. And be more careful from now on. Those are extremely rare."

Riki obeyed, dutifully closing the door behind him.

"So, what do you think?" Iason watched him with glistening eyes, knowing full well what his pet thought, having watched him standing transfixed, and completely naked, in the balcony for some minutes before he had interrupted his reverie with a little spank.

"It's...incredible, Iason," he marveled. "I've never seen anything like it. How the hell did you do it...so fast?"

“I’ve no patience for dragging something out that can be done right away,” the Blondie answered, tugging on his gloves. “The other landscapers have already left; I hired forty.”

“Can I go swimming now?” Riki pleaded, looking longingly at the pool.

“Not yet. Get dressed. We’re going out.”

“Where are we going?” The mongrel stared at Iason’s attire, curious. He was dressed to the hilt in one of his best “Iason Mink” outfits--this time a dark red skin-tight bodysuit with a white cape, and white, red-trimmed boots. The mongrel noticed his taming stick then, which reminded him to be careful in how he addressed Iason in public.

“I’ll tell you in the car. Get moving, Riki.” Iason smacked him again, this time a little harder, though with a gloved hand.

“But...I haven’t had any breakfast,” the mongrel whined.

“You can eat on the way. And it’s already lunchtime. Move.”

Riki didn’t need any additional prompting. He was anxious to get out of the penthouse, and since Iason had said he would tell him where they were going “in the car,” he knew they were going out into the city. He hurried to his room, skipping past the landscapers, but this time--now followed closely by Iason--there was no laughing at his nudity. And among themselves, after master and pet had left the pool area, the workers whispered about Iason’s mongrel pet and the marks of punishment on his flesh.

Dressing quickly after freshening up in the sink, Riki went looking for Iason, peeking into Enyu’s room as he walked by. The Xeronian was masturbating, as usual, watching a holograph of a Blondie performing fellatio on a pet, a forbidden image that Jupiter had banned but which continued to be programmed into most projectors without her knowledge.

“Meow,” Riki teased, sticking his head into his room. “Hey cat-boy. Jerking off again, I see. You know, your dick might fall off one of these days.”

Too aroused to even respond to his taunts, Enyu glared back, grunting through gritted teeth.

“I bet you want me to suck you, huh?” Riki tormented him by flicking his tongue suggestively at him.

“Ohhh,” Enyu groaned, suddenly ejaculating, his semen shooting up like a rocket.

Laughing hysterically at Enyu’s complete lack of control, Riki left the Xeronian to his pre- interval agony, hurrying toward the great hall.

When he saw Iason waiting for him with his chains, he stopped in his tracks. Master and pet stared at one another for a long, tension-filled moment.

“Come here,” Iason commanded, firmly, wondering if Riki would wear the chains without protest, or if he would have to be tamed yet again.

Riki was about to object when Enyu came into the hall, furious.

“Just wait until tomorrow, mongrel. I’ll fuck you ‘til you bleed,” he snarled, before he saw that Iason was standing right there.

Wisely refraining from replying, Riki looked to Iason for his response to this threat on his chastity.

Setting the chains onto the bar counter, Iason whipped out his taming stick and, before Enyu could even respond, he pushed him up against the wall, pulling up his garment to reveal his bare flesh.

“You will never touch Riki without my permission, Enyu, nor make such promises,” came his stern reprimand, followed by a series of hard strikes to his thighs, punishing blows that were all the more painful on the Xeronian’s sore flesh. His cries filled the house, rousing Katze from his opiate-induced slumber and drawing Odi from the balcony into the great hall, where he watched with dark fascination. It was over fairly quickly, after which Enyu simply fell to the floor, sobbing, much to Riki’s satisfaction.

Sliding the stick back into the sheath, Iason then picked up the chains, looking at Riki threateningly. With a whimpering Enyu kneeling on the floor watching him jealously, the mongrel proudly held out his wrists to be chained, much to his master’s relief and pleasure.

Enyu had never seen a pet in gold-plated pet cuffs and chains before, and these were also engraved with Iason's initials. No wonder the mongrel looked so proud to wear them--he certainly would. And hadn't his master promised to get him a wardrobe? He was in desperate need of a change of clothes, yet the Blondie seemed to have forgotten all about him. Enyu rubbed his nose, sniffing, feeling keenly the injustice of his punishment. His only comfort was the knowledge that by tomorrow, everything would be different; neither master nor pet would be able to resist him.

"Are you going out?" Odi asked.

"Yes. I won't be needing an escort."

Odi was visibly unhappy with this answer. "Someone needs to go with you. That defeats the whole purpose, if you won't let us guard you."

"I'm more concerned about the security of the penthouse. And I'm armed," Iason replied, pulling back his cape to reveal a new laser, fastened via a tight leather garter to his thigh.

Shaking his head, Odi returned to the balcony, muttering to himself as he lit up another smoke.

"Can I see that?" Riki asked, excitedly.

"Master!" he added, quickly, as Iason's hand moved toward his taming stick.

"Later, pet," Iason replied, securing the master cuff to his wrist that was attached to Riki's neck chain.

"Master...I never got breakfast," the mongrel complained.

"Tai!" Iason called out.

Immediately, a bright-eyed man of medium-height and dark, reddish-black hair rushed into the hall, carrying a meal box.

"This is our new cook," the Blondie said casually.

"Your lunch, Sir Riki," Tai said, bowing to him.

Speechless, Riki took the meal box, feeling a little overwhelmed by the sheer number of changes and new faces at the penthouse.

Noting his pet's surprise, Iason nodded. "With Enyu and the new bodyguards, it is too much of a job for one Furniture to deal

with meal preparation, and Juthian won't know what to do. Tai is very good. He was the head chef for Prince Ruu of Aristia."

Tai beamed at Iason's praise, bowing again. Riki was mesmerized by his carnelian gold-flecked eyes, a color he had never seen before. He had heard of Aristians, of course--a gentle people scattered among the countless exotic islands of the green Aristian sea, known throughout the galaxy for their excellent seamanship, smooth wines, delectable cuisine, exotically beautiful pets, and truly exceptional art.

Riki was itching to ask Iason more about Tai, and had a thousand questions about the gardens and what was happening at the penthouse, but he held his tongue until they were alone, feeling rather unenthusiastic about affixing "Master" to his every comment.

As soon as they were in the elevator, he pressed Iason with questions.

"Where are we going? When did you hire that Aristian guy...have you been to Aristia?"

"We are going to Tanagura Medical. I hired Tai yesterday, and yes, I've been to Aristia twice."

"We're going to see Daryl?" Riki cried.

"No," Iason began, then considered. "Yes, we might stop by while we're there. But we're going to Tanagura Reconstruction to do something about your brand-mark."

"What are you going to do?" he demanded, alarmed.

"Remove it."

"How can you do that--they'd have to cut off my skin!"

"I'm having a signature plate put in."

"What the fuck is that?"

"It will be grafted onto the skin. And you won't feel it--they'll anesthetize you there so you won't even know what they're doing."

"Oh," Riki said, relaxing. "What's it like on Aristia?"

"Indescribable. I'll take you there one day."

"You will?" Excited, the mongrel pet snuggled closer to his master, chains jangling a bit as he moved.

Iason smiled, eyes soft and gentle. "Would you like that, pet?"

“Fuck yeah. I’ve never been off Amoi. Is he living with us...Tai?”

“Yes.”

“Then we have three bodyguards, cat-boy, and Tai--plus the new Furniture, Juthian?”

“Another bodyguard will be joining us tomorrow.”

“It’s a good thing you opened up that guest wing. Now you’ll only have...TWO rooms left there, and one of them you’re being all weird and mysterious about,” Riki probed.

The beautiful Blondie made no reply, averting his eyes.

“What’s in that room?” his pet pressed, boldly.

“Not...open for discussion, pet,” Iason sighed.

Riki fell silent for a moment. “I need a smoke,” he groaned.

“Not in the car, Riki.”

“What! Can’t I smoke real fast right now then?”

The elevator floor opened on the ground floor, Iason’s vehicle just steps away.

“No.”

“Iason!”

The Blondie turned and took hold of his pet’s chin. “No, pet. When I say no, don’t argue with me.”

Sulking, Riki made no reply, following Iason in a decidedly grumpy mood. “You have no idea what it feels like not to be able to smoke,” he muttered, crawling into the vehicle first from Iason’s side, his chains clanking as he climbed awkwardly over to the passenger seat, meal box pressed to his chest.

“That is because I am smart enough not to adopt a vice like smoking.”

“Hah! I’d like to see you go one day without your precious wine. And you don’t think...taking your own pet is a vice?”

Smiling at his pet’s valid point, Iason slid into his seat, turning to him with mock sternness, although his pet did not recognize it as such. “Do I need to turn you over my knee right now and tame you, pet?” he threatened, slamming his door shut.

“No,” Riki grumbled, staring down at his meal box. He became distracted by its intricate ornamentation, an exotic design of black and periwinkle blue. “This is really beautiful. Hey, do you think Tai stole it from that one prince?”

Laughing, Iason pulled Riki close to him by his neck chain, and then kissed him gently.

“Pet,” he whispered, affectionately.

“You’re giving me a hard-on,” the mongrel announced unromantically.

“I thought you wanted more kissing?”

“Only if there's fucking involved.”

Releasing him with a chuckle, Iason then started up the vehicle and pulled out of the apartment complex parking lot.

Opening the meal box, Riki discovered firsthand why Aristians were known for their cuisine--he had never tasted anything more delicious in his life than the little lunch Tai had prepared for him, though he had no idea what it was. Feeling sated, and overjoyed to be out of the penthouse, Riki was prepared to enjoy his afternoon out with Iason.

When they arrived at Tanagura Medical, Iason parked in front of the entrance.

“Hey. You can’t park here,” Riki remarked.

“Is that so?” his master chuckled, getting out of the vehicle. Riki scrambled after him.

As soon as they entered the hospital, they were greeted by staff. “Good afternoon, Sir Iason. What an honor,” the receptionist said, bowing.

Iason raised a hand to acknowledge the countless greetings directed his way, nodding slightly at the receptionist. Riki stared in disbelief as they passed a statue that was erected near the front desk: it was in a very favorable likeness of his master, the inscription reading, “In honor of our patron Iason Mink, Tanagura's most generous benefactor.”

As soon as they got into the elevator, Riki exploded. "They have a fucking STATUE of you in the lobby," he laughed. "What did you do, build this hospital?"

"Oh no. Only the children's wing."

"You...built an entire wing?"

"I funded it."

Riki shook his head, smiling. "You...surprise me sometimes."

The elevator door opened to the Reconstruction wing, and Riki was immediately mesmerized by the Blondie with a bionic arm who greeted them, standing as if he had been waiting for their arrival.

"Iason," the Blondie said, smiling.

"Heiku."

"Everything's ready. This way."

Iason and his pet followed the towering Blondie to a room with a sheet-covered examining table.

"He needs to remove his bottoms and lie facedown on the table," Heiku said.

"Riki," Iason nudged, when his pet remained motionless.

As Riki slowly doffed his trunks, Iason uncuffed himself from his pet, allowing him to move freely.

Riki climbed onto the table, and Heiku positioned a screen on his upper back that blocked his view of what was going on. He scowled, looking suspiciously at Heiku when he picked up a long needle.

"A little stick," Heiku warned, injecting the numbing medication into the mongrel's lower back.

"Ow! Fuck!" Riki swore.

Both Blondies chuckled a little at him.

"Lie still," Heiku commanded, then turned to Iason. "Here it is," he said, picking up the membrane-thin flexible gold plate, on which the initials I. M. were boldly engraved in elegant script.

Riki strained to see the plate but could only see that it was gold. He was distracted by Heiku's hand, his bionic fingers moving as gracefully as his natural hand. He liked that Heiku had opted not to

cover his mechanics with a skin graft, finding his every move fascinating.

Iason nodded his approval. "Perfect." He pointed to the skin-like material that edged the plate and covered its bottom. "What is this?"

"Synthetic skin. This is what grafts to his skin."

"Intriguing."

"Are you sure you want to remove the brand first? The plate will cover the initials."

"Remove them," Iason replied, without hesitation. Even if Raoul's initials were covered, he would know they were there.

The procedure took about an hour, and when it was finished, Riki was permanently marked as the pet of Iason Mink, although he did not yet know that the plate had been personalized with his master's initials. Heiku applied a bandage, cautioning Iason to clean the graft carefully each day. "Just use a dry cloth for the plate, though," he added.

As they left Reconstruction, Riki tugged on Iason's sleeve.

"Yes, pet?" Iason whispered, bending down.

"Can we go see Daryl?" he whispered back.

"For a few minutes," Iason conceded.

"Iason," Riki asked again, after a moment.

"Yes?"

"Can I have a bionic arm?"

At this, the Blondie threw back his head and laughed, a lovely, musical sound that turned heads.

"If you lose your arm, then you may have one," Iason promised.

"Can't you just have it removed?" Riki pouted.

"Don't be silly, pet. I don't want any part of your body replaced with prosthesis, unless it's absolutely necessary." The Blondie tugged on his neck chain, pulling him close.

"If I had a bionic dick, I could really fuck you good," his pet whispered.

"Hush," Iason replied, but was unable to suppress a smile.

They were approaching Daryl's wing, and Iason tapped on his shoulder, then showed him his taming stick as a reminder of the behavior he expected from him.

Riki sighed, but remained quiet.

The blue-haired lady descended on them as they entered the ward.

"Visiting hours are not until 7:00 this evening," she announced with authority, blocking their path. She studied Iason, perplexed, trying to place his face.

"Forgive our intrusion," Iason said, his voice smooth as silk. "But we were here on other business, and I thought I might come and see how my Furniture was doing. He has been in your care these past few days." Riki rolled his eyes at Iason's sudden charm, his voice and demeanor obviously designed to beguile the blue-haired lady into admitting him.

A series of expressions crossed the woman's face in rapid succession, from surprise at his flirtation, to admiration of his physical beauty, to confusion, recognition and finally, horror.

"Sir...Iason Mink?" she asked, her voice barely audible.

"At your service," he replied with a slight bow, his sensuality and intense, intelligent gaze melting her icy reception.

She stared at him, visibly softening, then smiled.

"Forgive me, I--yes of course, Daryl is just this way, he is doing fine and will be released tomorrow, barring unforeseen complications."

The blue-haired lady, having heard about the great Iason Mink most of her life, had been content to snort at every mention of his name, but she had never met the beautiful Blondie before, and he had completely enchanted her with his intoxicatingly seductive manner.

She felt flattered, admired--which was just what Iason had hoped to achieve. In a single instant, her perception of Tanagura's famous Blondie was irrevocably altered; from that point on in her life, she would proudly boast of how Iason Mink had been so taken by her that she felt he might have pursued her, if only she had been

a Blondie, and many a conversation would be peppered with an insertion of Iason Mink as the topic, her own view being that he was the most magnificent, benevolent, charming Blondie on Amoi, after which she would advance her theory on Iason's secret infatuation with her charms.

Riki followed his master, shaking his head. No wonder Iason was so powerful-- he could manipulate anyone into conforming to his will. Had he known exactly how acidic the blue-haired lady's manner was typically, he would have been even more impressed.

Iason, upon apprehending a Blondie acquaintance in the hall near Daryl's room, uncuffed Riki to allow him to visit Daryl alone.

Daryl smiled as he entered the room. "Riki."

"Hey. You're still alive."

"As are you."

They stared at each other for a moment, memories of the horrible night of Riki's abduction flooding both of them.

"You...I wanted to thank you, for...trying to save me."

"I didn't know what to do," Daryl apologized. "I should have...done something different."

Riki grinned. "You should have seen the look on Raoul's face when you bit his ear."

"Oh yeah?" Daryl smiled.

"We have bodyguards now. Three--and another one is supposed to come. AND we have a chef. And...did Katze tell you about Enyu?"

"You mean cat-boy?" Daryl guessed. "He told me."

"Well, I got to fuck him yesterday, the little brat. Oh! Iason opened the guest wing! And there are pools, two pools that he filled, and a pond, and the butterflies but you have to keep the door closed, and about a million landscapers, and gardens with fountains...and I have a new room with a holograph projector where they copulate, the pets I mean, and a billiard room. And a bar and kitchen. And on the tapestry in my room, it has people fucking. Plus I got to open Omaki's box from the Taming Tower and Iason is letting me do stuff for six more nights. Last night I tied him up and did all sorts of

naughty things to him. I shocked him accidentally with this one toy and he got really pissed off.”

Daryl nodded, feeling a little lost with the mongrel’s soliloquy. He’d only been gone a couple of days and the penthouse sounded like a completely different place, and he had no idea what Riki had just tried to tell him--except for one thing. He couldn’t believe Iason had finally opened the mysterious guest wing. Even Katze wouldn’t tell him about that.

“Cat-boy got spanked. And then tamed again this morning,” Riki whispered. “It was awesome.”

“How’s Katze?”

“He’s doing okay. It was pretty rough...he was still in bed when I left.”

“What?” Daryl asked, confused. “What was rough?”

“What do you think? His whipping last night. Didn’t you think that might be a little rough?”

Now Daryl stared back at him horrified. “His...whipping? But he was here last night--he didn’t say anything about it!”

Riki then realized his error. “Oh. I guess...he didn’t want you to know.”

For the first time, Daryl felt truly angry with Katze, but his heart bled for him, too, as he imagined what his lover had gone through. “Why didn’t he tell me?” he demanded, incensed. “So...was it bad, then?”

“Well...yeah, Daryl. It was bad--but he was brave about it, and he’ll be okay.”

Blinking back stinging tears, the grey-eyed youth fell silent, imagining Katze’s pain.

“You’re coming home tomorrow, right?” Riki asked, softly.

Daryl nodded.

“Hey! That asshole boyfriend of yours fucking beat me with the taming stick!”

“He told me. I’m sure you deserved it.”

“What! Everyone’s turning against me now.”

Iason entered the room then. "Let's go, Riki," he said, then nodded at Daryl. "You're feeling better?"

"Yes. Thank you, Master Iason."

The Blondie fastened the master cuff to his arm. "We'll see you back at the penthouse tomorrow, then."

"Yes, Sir."

With that the Blondie turned to leave and Riki followed, giving Daryl a little salute as he left, though he was a bit surprised that Iason hadn't spent more than a few seconds talking to Daryl. The blue-haired lady gifted Iason with a warm goodbye as they left the ward, which the Blondie answered with an amused smile.

As soon as they reached the elevator, Riki confronted him. "You hardly said anything to Daryl. Don't you care about him?"

"His condition is stable. What else is there to inquire about?" His Blondie master examined his manicure impassively.

Riki shook his head, exasperated. "You know he tried to save me."

"And for that he's to be rewarded, but this hardly seemed the appropriate time or place."

Placated by this, the mongrel now sighed. "My back hurts. Are we going home now?"

"Not yet, pet."

"Where are we going now?" Riki demanded.

His master leaned against the wall of the elevator, arms crossed on his chest. "To Midas. To see Omaki Ghan."

* * *

They approached the Taming Tower from the ground, despite Riki's incessant begging to move into airspace. Iason was inflexible; he knew that, after his last flight, which exceeded protocol speed restrictions, Jupiter had no doubt marked his vehicle for immediate notification upon airspace re-entry. He was in no mood to coddle Jupiter and explain why he was heading back to Midas; it was no concern of hers, and he resented her constant intrusions in his

private life. The Blondie could still play Jupiter, but he was finding it became increasingly difficult to perform under her unblinking scrutiny. He hated that he owed her. Without Jupiter's intervention that awful night, his position would have been compromised, and trade relations with Alpha Zen would have been destroyed.

As they drew closer to the Taming Tower, Riki fell silent, staring out the window at the familiar sights. When last he had come into Midas, he had hardly been in a state to appreciate that he was returning to his old haunts for the first time in over two years.

Now he gazed at the pleasure city through new eyes, feeling strangely removed, almost contemptuous of its seedy, carnival-like atmosphere.

He had come a long way in two years in his thinking; now he was the pampered pet of Tanagura's Iason Mink, living in a posh penthouse in Eos, and part of him couldn't help but be a little proud. Iason's exotic hybrid ground/air vehicle drew admiring stares--some of recognition--and Riki almost wished the windows were not darkened so that he could be seen with the famous Blondie.

At the Taming Tower they pulled into reserved parking; once again Iason parked wherever he chose, much to Riki's amusement. Upon entering the tower, he instinctively shuddered; the sound of screams brought back the unpleasant memory of his hours with Raoul. Iason pulled him close as they walked, as if sensing his discomfort.

They reached Omaki's private chambers in a matter of minutes; Iason seemed to know exactly where he was going. Upon their entry, Omaki greeted them with a slight bow, obviously having viewed their arrival from his terminal.

"What a pleasure, Iason. I see you've brought your famous pet."

"Give me the footage, Omaki," came the Blondie's rather unfriendly reply.

"Ah, business before pleasure, is it? Very well. I'll need your retinal signature."

"You'll hand over that footage, or I'll slit your belly and pull your intestines out onto your chest," Iason replied, coldly. "Your days of extracting credits from me are over."

Riki grinned at his master's threat, watching Omaki to see what he would do.

"Ooo, you're sexy when you're angry, Iason. You and I might have had some fun times together," Omaki replied, with a little smile.

"The footage, Omaki."

"Aki!" The Blondie summoned his boy-pet, who walked uncertainly into the room, carrying a small envelope. Upon seeing Iason, he froze, staring up at him in fear. This was the great Iason Mink, who his master had told him was coming to spank him for refusing to eat his vegetables.

"Give him the envelope, Aki," Omaki said, amused with his pet's reaction.

With trembling fingers, Aki reached out to offer the package, unable to move any closer. Iason reached down and took it, smiling at the boy. "Are you afraid of me?"

"No," the boy lied, looking back at his master for help.

"Come sit on my lap, Aki. I've decided you're to be forgiven. No punishment today." Omaki patted his thighs, and Aki ran to him, grinning when the Blondie lifted him up onto his lap.

"That's what you've come for," Omaki said, nodding to the envelope. "What do you think of my Aki?" The Blondie whispered something in the boy's ear, soliciting a giggle.

"You are aware that a pet must be at least twelve years of age?"

"Are you lecturing me on acceptable pet etiquette?" Omaki eyed Riki suggestively. "As if this mongrel wasn't enough, I've heard you've acquired a Xeronian."

"Yes." Iason was curt, examining the envelope and finding a small computer disc inside.

"Mmmm. I've always wanted one of those. I've heard they rut. Have they paired yet, your two pets?"

Now Iason stared back, one hand on his hip. "Have you taken him yet, Omaki?" he demanded, nodding to Aki.

"Funny you should ask. I have been tempted--quite tempted I must confess. But I have restricted myself to just a taste here and there. Nothing the boy minds, I assure you. Would you like to be the first?" Here Omaki put his hand on Aki's thigh, suggestively, his eyes glittering as he watched Iason's reaction.

"I'd better never hear another word of this," Iason said, holding up the envelope threateningly. Then he abruptly turned and left.

"You didn't say anything about my box," Omaki called after them. "Didn't you like it? I'm quite certain not everything in it was stolen."

"He wants a Xeronian," Riki whispered as they took the elevator down to the ground floor. "Why don't you give him cat-boy?"

"Not that simple, pet," the Blondie replied, although it did seem like the perfect match. Still, he couldn't just give Jupiter's pet away...not without a good reason.

"You want to keep him," the mongrel accused, pouting.

Now Iason smiled. "Is my pet jealous again?" he pulled Riki close by his neck chain, bending down to kiss him.

"A little," his pet confessed.

The elevator door opened and they moved apart, assuming their expected master/pet roles. As they had just exited the Tower, Iason was recognized by a Senator from Urus, who stopped him to discuss the upcoming trade conference with Alpha Zen.

Bored, Riki longed to smoke, but knew better than to do so in public without his master's permission. He leaned against the wall, staring out at the busy square, the hub of the notorious E-zone, bustling with people of all kinds--mongrels, Blondies, dignitaries, Furniture--everyone that had business in Midas or who came to the city for pleasure.

Suddenly, his heart stopped. There, not so far away, was Guy. His old pairing partner--hair pulled back in his signature ponytail, his distinctive laugh rising above the crowds. He was with someone-

-a young mongrel with short, dark hair--a lot like Riki. Guy put his arm around the youth and they began walking directly towards him.

Panicked, Riki moved close to Iason to hide from Guy's view. Iason, thinking that his pet simply wanted his attention, pulled him close and rested his hand on his shoulder, thrilled with his pet's endearing behavior.

Riki peeked past Iason's cloak and saw that he had escaped Guy's detection; he had moved on down the street, seeming very friendly with his new partner.

All at once, it was as though Riki's world crumbled. Everything came flooding back--the fateful day in Midas he had met Iason, his life as leader of Bison, the gang, Guy--everything that he had been before he became the pet of Iason Mink. It was not so much that he was jealous of Guy's new love--although it admittedly gave him a little sting--it was the sudden realization that he had become exactly the sort of person he would have abhorred. And that Guy would have detested. He was scum--a Blondie's pet, and worse--he had come to enjoy it.

He barely noticed when the other Blondie left and Iason was leading him to the car. He climbed in, shaking, trying to get his emotions under control.

At first Iason was oblivious to his pet's state, preoccupied with the Senator's remarks, particularly the rumor circulating about a shipment of female captives from Aristia, something which Iason had not heard before. But once they were on the road back to Tanagura, he looked over at Riki and immediately saw that something was wrong.

"What is it, pet?"

Riki shook his head, staring out the window.

Now Iason fell silent, trying to figure out why his pet was sulking. "Are you upset about Enyu?" he smiled.

The mongrel gave him an odd look, as though completely puzzled by his question. "Fuck no," he answered.

"I see."

For a while they drove in silence. The Blondie continually turned to look at his pet, starting to become a little perplexed. The look on Riki's face was something he had not seen...in a long time. Not since his early taming days. It was a look of...dark rebellion.

“Riki,” he began again, his voice a little sharper. “What's on your mind?”

“My thoughts are my own,” the mongrel snapped, gifting him with another foul look.

A look of...hatred.

Surprised, and not a little annoyed--and hurt--Iason continue to drive, now piecing together the events of their trip in an attempt to determine exactly what had happened. He had seemed fine when they went to visit Omaki Ghan; even afterwards, though Riki had admitted being jealous, he had moved toward him while they were standing on the street. It made no sense.

But there was no denying something was very wrong with Riki.

Deciding that perhaps his pet needed some space, Iason decided to let the matter rest. Perhaps when they returned to the penthouse, everything would return to normal.

His hopes were dashed when Riki, upon being released from his chains, immediately made for his room, without a glance at him. Iason followed, starting to feel a little angry. When he saw that his pet had locked the door, his heart began pounding. Overriding the lock codes, he entered, finding Riki at the bar, pouring himself a drink.

“You know perfectly well you are not allowed to drink before 8:00, pet.”

Riki made no reply, but his eyes gleamed with unmistakable hostility.

“Let's have it. What's going on, Riki?”

“Just leave me alone.”

“I see. Are you forfeiting your night with me?”

“Yes.”

The Blondie now walked toward him, menacingly. “Did you think that meant I would not come for you on my own?”

Riki shrugged, eyes averted.

Iason moved behind him and began running his hands down his body, kissing his throat. His pet remained unresponsive, although his developing erection betrayed his interest.

“Do you think...you can resist me, Riki?”

Closing his eyes, the mongrel swallowed, trying desperately not to respond to Iason's advances, although he was now trembling.

Iason reached under his shirt and found a nipple, squeezing it in just the manner he knew Riki loved, as he fondled him with his other hand. “Don't fight it, pet,” he whispered.

But Riki remained impassive, although he grew rigid and hard in his master's experienced hands. Suddenly Iason withdrew his hand, yanking down the mongrel's pants and making him step out of them. He positioned himself behind him again, pushing his legs apart with his knees, forcing Riki to widen his stance.

“What, you think you can hold back?” he whispered again, nibbling on his ear. “You don't want me to hear you cry out, is that it?”

Riki could feel his master's erection between his legs, rubbing against him tauntingly. He held his breath, steeling himself for the pain of penetration.

Then, unexpectedly, the Blondie crouched down, spread him with his delicate fingers, and proceeded to pleasure him with his tongue, flicking and penetrating in an alternating pattern--just the way he knew Riki wanted it.

Gritting his teeth, Riki squeezed his eyes shut, his palms now pressed hard on the bar counter, as he tried not to vocalize his delight. When Iason reached around and continued stroking him, it was too much, despite his resolve not to enjoy it. He groaned, overcome with pleasure.

“That's it,” Iason whispered, excited, stopping his delicious ministrations for a moment. “Don't hold back now.”

As Iason continued pleasuring his pet, Riki was, in the end, unable to stop himself from crying out his release; it was simply too

exquisite, too perfect, too indescribably sweet. He fell forward onto the bar counter, feeling defeated and humiliated.

The Blondie was immediately behind him again, lying over him and nuzzling against his cheek. "That was beautiful, Riki. Don't ever deny me your passion."

But the mongrel did not reply, choking back tears of shame.

Denial and Forbidden Love

“Now,” Iason whispered, “stay just like that, love.”

Riki still lay collapsed over the bar counter, legs wide apart, eyes shut tight with shame. With patient fingers, the Blondie guided himself into him, slowly, anxious for release but feeling that his pet needed something more gentle than usual.

The mongrel responded to his entrance with a little sigh, angry with himself for welcoming his advances. He forced himself to remain still, though he wanted to buck back and invite deeper penetration.

Iason shuddered, sliding his hands under Riki's shirt and then running them down his muscular back to his waist. He grabbed hold of his hips, pulling back forcefully as he began thrusting. His pet lay limply, completely unresponsive, which puzzled the beautiful Blondie. He was enjoying himself, but felt distracted by Riki's odd behavior.

He smacked his pet abruptly on the ass to get a rise out of him.

“Hey!” Riki objected, startled.

“Oh, so you're still alive? I wanted to be sure I wasn't taking a corpse.”

“Fucking asshole.”

This provided just the additional stimulation the Blondie needed; changing gears, he suddenly became rough with his pet, thrusting hard and pulling back on his head by his dark hair.

“I've had it with your sulking,” he hissed. “Why don't you tell me what's on your mind.”

“Get your fucking dick out of my ass first,” Riki snapped back.

“Ohhh,” Iason breathed brokenly, “not until I've fucked you properly.”

Riki couldn't help but smile at his master's phrasing and the insertion of a vulgarity into his normally elegant speech. “Then hurry up and come already.”

Iason responded to this by slowing down, deliberately drawing out the sex. “I'll come when I'm ready to come. Maybe I'll just take you all night. Would you like that?”

“Hmphf,” Riki snorted, then fell silent, wondering if Iason was serious.

“I take that as a challenge. Tonight, pet, you're going to relearn some basic principles of obedience. I'm going to take you, over and over, until you fully submit to me.”

“Yeah right,” Riki muttered.

“What, do you doubt me?” Now Iason laughed. “I assure you, pet, I have been quite restrained with you. You are going to find out tonight how much more demanding I can be.”

Riki, who already felt raw, shivered a little at this threat, kicking himself for forfeiting his night with Iason. Now the night would be under the Blondie's terms, and he knew his master well enough to know he didn't make idle threats.

His silence amused the Blondie, who now increased his speed again, savoring the warm wetness of his pet's anal grip. A night of unrestrained coital pleasure with Riki was exactly what he needed--and what Riki, needed, too.

Before he caught himself, Riki uttered a little moan, which gave Iason just the right amount of stimulation to push him past his critical point. He ejaculated hard into his pet, gritting his teeth as he groaned. He withdrew, his departure eliciting another small moan--this time of pain--from the mongrel.

“The night's only begun, pet,” he said, his voice still thick with sex.

Riki stood up, reaching around to his bandage. “This fucking thing is stinging like hell.”

“Leave it on.”

Ignoring him, Riki ripped it off, staring back at the plate in surprise. "What the...what the fuck? You... these are your fucking initials!"

"Why did you just disobey me?" Iason snapped, giving him a hard smack on his bottom.

"Ow! Why did you put this fucking thing on me? And what's it doing...it feels like it's melting into my skin!"

"It's starting to dissolve. Your skin will start to absorb it so it becomes a permanent part of your body."

"What the fuck? What are you talking about?"

"It's a branding plate. Ultimately it will look just like your skin-only it will have the same golden coloration and engravings as the plate. Much more elegant than a burned brand, don't you agree?"

"You mean I'm fucking going to have your bloody initials on my ass forever?"

"Does that displease you so much?" Iason asked, quietly, a little hurt.

"I'm not a fucking animal to be branded like property!"

"But you are my pet, and you do belong to me."

"I don't belong to you or anyone else," Riki challenged, eyes flashing.

Angry, Iason grabbed him by his hair and pulled his head back, hard. "What's that, pet? Who do you belong to?"

"No one!" he screamed. "I belong to no one!"

"Is that so?" Now Iason was furious, his voice shaking as he fought to get his emotions under control. He slammed Riki against the wall, peering into his eyes. "All right. That's it. You're going to tell me what brought all this on. Stop sulking and spit it out."

Riki looked away, silent.

Iason grabbed his chin, forcing his attention. "Look at me. Let's have it. Out with it."

"Fuck off," came the mongrel's dark reply.

Riki stared defiantly into the Blondie's gentle blue eyes, now sharpened with anger.

Normally such a remark would have earned his pet immediate retribution, but Iason was puzzled with Riki's behavior. "What happened today?" he pressed. "It had to be something...in Midas." As soon as Iason said the word, he realized he had uncovered the source of his pet's distress. The look in Riki's eyes was tormented...almost haunted.

"Something from Midas, isn't that it?" he asked, and then, more softly, "Tell me, Riki.. You know there is nothing I wouldn't do for you if it be in my power. Perhaps you saw something...you wanted?"

"Yes," Riki choked out, the words sticking in his throat. "I saw something I wanted. My freedom. My past. My...life."

Iason sighed, pausing for a moment. "It has been...a long time since you spoke in this way. Why now?"

Again Riki attempted to look away.

"Look at me," Iason said, a little sharply, grabbing hold of his chin and turning his head again. "You are going to tell me, and you are going to tell me NOW. Out with it."

"I saw...Guy," Riki spat out, finally.

"Guy?" Iason tried to place the name, then remembered. Riki's old pairing partner from the slums. He sighed again, disappointed. "I see."

"He didn't see me. He...was with someone else."

Iason studied him for a moment, noting Riki's angst with a little bit of surprise...and pain. It was clear Guy still meant something to him...even after all this time. He released him, and started to pour himself some wine, then changed his mind. Slamming a glass down onto the counter, he poured himself a brandy.

Riki remained motionless, staring down at his feet. After a few moments he put his pants back on, zipping them up almost angrily.

"So...you still love this Guy, is that it?" Iason asked finally, after taking a good long drink.

"I...don't know," Riki answered, honestly. He was confused. He didn't know what to feel. He only knew that it seemed horribly

wrong to be in love with his Blondie master, and that if Guy could see him now, he'd probably kill him for what he'd become. But Guy represented everything from his past, his childhood, his life as it had been up to the day he met the powerful Blondie who now ruled his world. To have forgotten him so completely seemed the ultimate betrayal, and Riki could not forgive himself for it. He could not remember how or when it had happened exactly, but somewhere along the way the face in his mind had ceased to be Guy's and had become...Iason's.

His pet's ambiguous reply gave Iason a deep stab of jealousy, a dark, angry feeling that he had not felt since...not since that night he had come upon Raoul with Anori. He felt angry, hurt, and now he loathed Guy, this mongrel who apparently had rekindled his pet's affections. He was so tempted to find him and rip his limbs from his body, or maybe sell him off to the Aristian pet dealers headed for the border planets. But he knew this would devastate Riki, that his pet would never forgive him.

The jealousy ate away at him, tearing him up inside. Suddenly, in a fit of rage, he hurled his now empty glass across the room, where it shattered against the far wall.

Startled, Riki instinctively took a step back, as though he expected Iason to strike him. He'd never seen the Blondie show his anger in such a manner before.

Iason continued to stand, hands on the bar, staring at the counter as though deep in thought. He struggled to get his emotions under control, trying to decide what to do.

"What is it you want from me?" he asked, finally.

Riki shook his head. "I want...one night with Guy. But not if he knows what I've become. He'd never forgive me."

"What you've become," Iason repeated slowly, now turning to look at him, and ignoring his pet's request. "Is it such a horrible thing to be my pet?"

"I'm nothing. I'm scum. I'm just vulgar, filthy pet trash."

"You are MY pet," Iason said sharply, "and that is something to be proud of."

“You're so fucking conceited, Iason. You think...the whole world bows down before you.”

Iason laughed, but it was a hollow sound, one that hid his sudden rage. Without a word, he dragged his pet over to the sofa, unsure what he was doing but feeling the need to do something. He felt hurt, and a little angry, that his pet seemed to have completely forgotten about his professions of love but a few days before. He should have known that Riki hadn't meant it when he'd said he loved him. He was still in love with his old pairing partner. And now Riki was back to denying his authority as master.

“Let me fucking guess! You're going to spank me again!”

Instead, Iason pulled Riki onto his lap and just held him close while he struggled and squirmed.

“Let me go!” Riki demanded, trying to free himself from his master's grasp but finding the Blondie's formidable strength too great an obstacle. “I'm not a child. I'm not a toy!”

Iason remained silent, letting Riki blow off some steam. When Riki finally stopped struggling, he nuzzled up to whisper in his ear. “I'm not letting you go until you acknowledge me as your master.”

“We'll be fucking sitting here forever then.”

“So be it.”

For a long time they simply sat thus until Riki began to realize that Iason was serious. Sighing, he let his head fall back against his chest.

“Who do you belong to?” Iason whispered.

But Riki remained stubbornly silent, refusing to give in. He was, however, in desperate need of a smoke. He squirmed uncomfortably for a few more minutes.

“If I tell you, can I go smoke?” he asked, finally.

“You may.”

“You're my master,” he grumbled. “Now can I go?”

Iason answered by releasing him. “Come right back. I'm not finished with you.”

Riki stood up, then paused. “You didn't answer me...about...what I asked.”

"I will answer you when I'm ready," Iason said, curtly.

Riki took off without a backward look, heading for the new balcony, where he immediately lit up, hands shaking. He took a deep drag and then exhaled, sighing. The garden was beautiful at night; the aromatic night-waking flowers had opened under the light of Ios, and the pleasant murmur of the fountains was relaxing.

He found a seat on the stone bench, staring into the dark, tranquil waters of the pond. He hadn't really noticed before, but there was something about the idyllic solitude of the garden that was... almost sad. Puzzled, he took another drag, wondering why such a strange thought had come into his head. Suddenly it was as though he could feel Iason's presence. He turned to look toward the door from the main pool, but the Blondie wasn't there. Yet he could sense his master--his enormous sadness, and something else. Jealousy? Anger?

Then he realized that these feelings had nothing to do with the garden. It was as though he had somehow stumbled into Iason's thoughts, could see, somewhat indistinctly, the complex inner workings of the elusive Blondie he had come to love, even though they were not together at the moment. Surely...he was imagining it. Yet the feelings, the images persisted, bombarding him with a bewildering flood of thoughts and emotions that could not possibly have come from his own mind-- they were not his own.

"I'm fucking going out of my mind," he muttered, shaking his head, his thoughts then drifting to the conversation about Agatha's Halo that he and Iason had shared, and what Iason had told him about finding him that day Raoul had abducted him. Was it possible that the stories were true...about Agatha? What if...because they loved one another, because they felt so strongly, they were somehow able to ride Agatha's Halo and achieve a psychic link?

"Yeah, right," he laughed, feeling stupid for even considering it. More likely he was thinking about Iason because he felt guilty. He knew he'd hurt him terribly. It wasn't like Iason to drink hard liquor.

And yes. He did love him. Regardless of his feelings for Guy, he knew Iason would always be the face he saw last when he fell asleep

at night. But he also couldn't deny that just one glimpse of Guy had hurled his emotional world into a state of chaos. Seeing Guy was like seeing himself, as he once had been. As he would never be again.

Now he longed again for his freedom. Even just to get out of Eos for awhile and stretch his legs in Tanagura. Iason would never grant his request to spend a night with Guy--he wasn't even sure why he had bothered to ask, or how he would have explained his long absence to Guy. He shuddered to think what Guy would do if he found out he'd been a Blondie's pet all this time. He sighed, his eyes moving to the pool, its waters looking cool and refreshing.

Suddenly the impulse to feel the water on his bare skin was too much. He tossed his smoke over the ledge and stripped, then dove into the cool, exhilarating water.

"Fuck yes," he breathed, as he came up for air. It felt wonderful. He swam for a bit, and then let his body go limp as he floated on the surface, staring up at the stars. He looked for Icaria and found it right away, remembering Iason's trick.

Iason was going to be pissed when he found him swimming without permission. Riki knew this, yet couldn't bring himself to really care. It was far too glorious to resist. And now he was too comfortable to get out. It was too late to pretend he hadn't gone swimming--his hair was wet. Now he would just wait until the Blondie came for him.

Unfortunately for him, he did not have to wait long. Suddenly, Iason was standing there at the end of the pool, hands on his hips.

"I see you've decided you want disciplined tonight after all," he scolded. "I did not give you permission to use the pool, pet. Get out. Now."

"You'll have to come in and get me," Riki challenged.

"I mean it, pet. Now."

"I mean it, too."

"Riki!"

"Iason!" The mongrel yelled back, grinning.

Iason suppressed a smile at his pet's deliberate naughtiness. "I'm warning you, Riki. You DON'T want me to come in there after you."

"Is that supposed to scare me? Cuz I'll have you know I'm the best swimmer in Ceres. You won't be able to catch me."

"Ohhh," Iason laughed brokenly. "You're really in for it now, pet." He undressed, starting to enjoy Riki's teasing.

"Can Blondies actually swim? What about all that hair?"

Iason answered this by diving perfectly into the pool, disappearing beneath the water.

"Oh fuck," Riki muttered, trying to see where Iason went, but the water was too dark. The next thing he knew, Iason had his arms around his waist, emerging from the water with his pet firmly in his arms.

Riki struggled a bit, but knew it was useless. As usual, Iason had overpowered him with embarrassing ease.

"So you decided to disobey me and then taunt me? I think you do want some discipline," Iason whispered, pulling his naked pet close to his own body. "You couldn't go one day, could you?" Now he pushed him up against the side of the pool, his own feet touching the bottom of the pool but his pet's dangling far above.

"In your...dreams," Riki replied, finding Iason's closeness in the water rather erotic.

Iason answered this by kissing him slowly, his tongue exploring him as though for the first time. It was an exquisite kiss, one that reawakened Riki's passion for Iason, who suddenly responded so eagerly and hungrily that Iason was actually rather surprised, given their earlier spat. Thrilled, he moaned a little as he kissed him harder, almost violently, then began kissing and biting the mongrel's neck, twirling his left nipple around in his fingers in just the way Riki couldn't resist.

Riki groaned. He was becoming aroused again, and he could feel Iason's erection swelling against his body.

"Ohhh...Riki," Iason breathed. "Please be like this tonight."

“Like...this?” Riki slid his hands down Iason's back, grabbing hold of his firm ass.

“Yes,” Iason whispered, excited. “Just like that.” He kissed Riki again, then, with intoxicating urgency, flipped Riki around so that he was facing the pool wall. Riki grabbed onto the ledge with a little gasp.

“Be gentle,” he pleaded.

Honoring his pet's request, Iason slid into him slowly, kissing his shoulder and neck. They had never copulated together in water before, other than the hot tub, and both master and pet were enjoying its sensual novelty. It was nothing short of a delicious fuck, wickedly erotic and all the more intense after their earlier argument.

“Pet,” Iason sighed. “You feel...perfect.”

Riki answered this with a little moan of agreement.

“I want to tell you something.”

“Hmmm?” Riki opened his eyes.

“I will give you almost anything you ask for if it be in my power...except for two things.”

“Two?” the mongrel gasped, fast approaching his critical point.

“Your freedom,” Iason whispered, “and a night with your old pairing partner.”

“Oh fuck.” Whether this was uttered in disappointment or in ecstasy was unclear, for his pet climaxed at that precise moment.

Iason soon followed, and both of them were quiet for a moment, breathing hard.

“Loosen my chain, then. Let me go out into the city.” Riki waited, his heart beating a little faster.

Iason paused for a long moment, remembering what had happened the last time Riki had gone out into Tanagura, with Daryl and Katze. “Very well. I'll allow you more freedoms--but you'll have to be accompanied by one of the bodyguards.

“What about Katze?”

“No.”

“It's not like it was before. I have the taming marks to prove it.”

“Let me think about it.”

Wisely deciding not to push the matter further, Riki fell silent as Iason withdrew. He winced. "Are you really going to fuck me all night?" he whined.

"Yes, pet."

"Why?" Riki demanded.

"To teach you."

"Teach me what?"

"To submit fully to me in all things."

"What makes you think that'll happen? I'll just be sore as hell and pissed off."

"No arguments, pet. Now, we have a little matter of your disobedience to attend to. You're in for some discipline, my naughty Riki."

"What kind of discipline?" came the mongrel's saucy reply.

"You'll find out. Let's go." With effortless grace, Iason lifted Riki out of the pool and up onto the ledge, then jumped out himself, ignoring the steps at the end of the pool.

"Can I smoke once more before we go back?" Riki pleaded.

"No."

The mongrel pouted at this.

"You smoke too much, pet. If you cannot voluntarily cut back I will have to start restricting you and rationing them out one at a time."

"Don't do that!" Riki pleaded. "I'll...okay, I'll smoke less, I promise."

Iason gave him a warning look, then shook his head as Riki picked up his shirt. "Don't bother dressing. Let's just go back to your room."

Thrilled, Riki followed the naked Blondie, wondering if they would run into anyone. "Aren't you afraid someone will see you?"

As if on cue, at that precise moment a movement in the pool room alerted them both that they had been spied upon...by Enyu. The Xeronian dashed back toward his room and Iason let him go, deciding to deal with his infraction later.

“You're in for it, cat-boy,” Riki called after him, grinning, his smile fading when Iason reprimanded him with another hard smack to his ass. “Ow,” he complained, rubbing himself.

“My, you're the sensitive one,” Iason observed. “Tonight's going to be a little hard on you, I think.”

“What the fuck does that mean? You're not seriously going to discipline me, are you? Just for jumping in the pool?”

“That and other things.”

“What other things?”

“As your master, I do not need to give you any reason for disciplining you, pet.”

“Then what's the fucking point!”

“The point,” Iason said, suddenly turning and pushing his pet up against the hall wall, “is that I enjoy disciplining you, and if I feel like doing so, I will.”

“You...sadistic fuck,” Riki muttered.

“Did you not once tell me that you enjoyed it?” Iason whispered.

“That...depends,” the mongrel answered, with a half-smile.

“On?”

“What kind of mood I'm in...and how mean you are.”

Iason laughed at this. “What kind of mood are you in tonight, Riki?”

Riki tilted his head, considering. “I could take a little punishment...if done properly.”

“Is that so?” Iason kissed his throat, then slid his tongue up his neck to his ear. “And...what would be the proper way?”

“Tie me up...and whatever you choose, don't go too far.”

“But how would that be punishment?” Iason asked, with a smile.

“It wouldn't, I guess. It would just be a little rough fun.”

Iason fell silent for a moment, staring at him. Then suddenly he took hold of his arm, leading him firmly, almost angrily to his room. He pushed him into the bedroom and lifted him up, throwing him down on the bed.

“What did I say?” Riki demanded, confused.

Iason's slight smile reassured him that the game was in progress.

"Oh." Riki relaxed, looking up expectantly.

The Blondie stood, one hand on his chin as if considering what to do next. He was still dripping wet, his hair hanging in dark blonde clumps. Then, he leaned over and dug through Omaki's box, finding the bondage cords. With a little smile, he snapped them in his hands. "Turn over--face down," he ordered, then proceeded to tie Riki's wrists to the bed.

"Ah! That's...tight," Riki complained.

"Hush!"

Iason continued going through the box, and Riki desperately tried to twist around to see what was going on. The next thing he knew, Iason had blindfolded him. He shivered, suddenly feeling deliciously vulnerable, wondering what the Blondie would do next.

Now a new sound pierced his consciousness, a soft clicking that he couldn't quite place. Then, suddenly, he felt a sharp sting on his thighs. He winced, holding his breath; then, another stinging strike to his thighs.

"Ouch! What the fuck...is that?"

"Did I give you permission to speak?" Iason demanded, striking him again.

Riki couldn't help but giggle--after voicing his discomfort--at Iason's domineering manner. Just knowing that this was a game made everything bearable.

The Blondie quickly ended his momentary mirth with a series of hard strikes in rapid succession. "Oh...you think this is funny, pet?" he hissed, now striking him harder.

"Ah! Fuck no!" Riki cried.

"How about now?" Another series of strikes, now brutal, to his bottom and thighs, eliciting a yelp and then a howl from his punished pet.

"That's too far!" Riki protested. "Okay? Stop now."

"And what makes you think I'm going to stop?" Iason answered, the tone of his voice betraying his amusement.

“But...you...you said...ahh!” Riki stammered, then cried out when Iason struck him again.

“What was that? I said...what?”

“Oh bloody hell. You said you'd stop!”

Now Iason laughed. “I did no such thing, my naughty little pet.” Another round of strikes, and then a pause, during which the Blondie dragged the implement--a beaded flogger--gently across his pet's skin, tauntingly.

“You...implied it,” Riki sulked, steeling himself for the next round.

“Pet. Make no mistake. When you deliberately disobey me--or defy me--you WILL be punished. You were nothing but trouble from the time we left Midas until just a short time ago. You removed the bandage when I told you not to. You defied me openly and refused to acknowledge me as your master, denying that you were my pet. You went swimming without permission.”

“Oh come on, Iason,” Riki snapped. “We both fucking know you're doing this because you're jealous of Guy.”

After a brief silence, Riki felt the tickle of Iason's still-wet hair on his back, and smelled the Blondie's distinctive scent as he leaned close to him. “Oh yes. I am jealous. As my pet, I want you all to myself. Even more...I want your heart completely, Riki. But only if you willingly give it to me. More than being jealous, what angers me is that you lied to me, that you told me you loved me, when now we both know that's not true.”

Riki knew this was his cue to protest that he did love Iason, but his pride prevented him from doing so, partly because he was now pissed off at him. “How could I ever really love the one person that took away the only two things I ever wanted?” he replied, coldly.

For a long moment there was a dead silence in the room. Riki's heart began beating faster when he felt Iason move away. He trembled, waiting for what he knew would be torture.

He waited. And...waited.

Now he began to doubt that Iason was still in the room. Had he just left him there? A sound from the other room confirmed his suspicions. Iason was pouring himself a drink.

Fuck, Riki thought, kicking himself for deliberately provoking Iason on such a sensitive issue. He was honestly a little scared about what his master would do, and the waiting, tied up and blindfolded, was agony.

* * *

When Yui finally awoke, he realized with dismay his master had already risen. Jumping up, he rushed back to his room to get cleaned up, then hurried to the kitchen to prepare his breakfast. His master's groans caught his attention, and he followed them to the master shower. As he listened, it became clear that Raoul was masturbating, the sounds of his sexual excitement all too familiar to the green-eyed youth. He listened with disappointment, wondering why his master had not taken him after they had slept in the same bed the entire night. Especially after yesterday...when he had, unbelievably, pleased the Blondie. With a feeling of failure, Yui realized then that his performance had most likely been substandard, and that his master would probably never solicit his sex again.

Forcing himself to push aside his own feelings, he rushed to the kitchen to make his master a good breakfast, knowing that he would be famished. He hadn't eaten anything the night before, and Raoul had an enormous appetite. Within minutes he had a feast ready on the table--eggs, bacon, sausage, toast, strawberries, blueberries, coffee, and griddle-cakes, and then continued to make a few more specialties in case his master wanted them.

"Yui," Raoul called from the table.

Yui dashed out to him, bowing. "I am sorry, Master Raoul. I...overslept."

"Yes. And for that, I'm going to have to whip you publicly," Raoul replied, sternly.

A little surprised, Yui braved a glance at his master, and saw from his eyes that he was being teased. It was the first time Raoul had ever played with him. He smiled, a little hesitantly.

“Are you finished in there?” Raoul asked.

“I have a few things going, Master.”

Raoul nodded, biting into a piece of toast. Yui waited while he chewed and swallowed, admiring his table manners. “When you're finished, come sit with me.”

“Sit...at the table with you?” Yui asked, confused.

“Yes. I want to talk to you about something.”

“Of course.” Yui bowed. “Excuse me, Master.”

Raoul gave him a slight nod of dismissal and Yui went back to the kitchen, his mind full of thoughts. What did his master want to talk to him about? Raoul had never invited him to sit at his table before. In a daze, he finished up in the kitchen, then brought a tray of sweet rolls and cream-filled krevlians-- Raoul's favorite.

“Ah, krevlians,” Raoul said, smiling. “Ready to sit down?”

“Yes,” Yui said, nervously.

“Where's your plate?”

“My...my plate, Master?”

“You're going to eat, aren't you?”

“You mean....eat with you?” Yui said, somewhat stupidly, but unable to believe his master was inviting him to eat with him--almost as if he were his equal.

Raoul nodded, starting in on the krevlians.

Yui rushed back to the kitchen to get a plate and some utensils, then dashed back, his face lit up so brightly that Raoul smiled. The boy was breathtaking.

“Perfect,” Raoul said, of the krevlians, although the adjective also described Yui's beautiful face. “Coffee's good.”

Beaming at his praise, Yui began helping himself to the food, a little tentatively at first, and then with more confidence. They ate in silence for awhile.

Raoul leaned back with his coffee. “That was magnificent, as always, Yui.”

"Thank you, Master," the green-eyed youth replied, hardly able to contain his joy over his master's compliments.

"Now. There's something we need to discuss," he said, setting down his cup. "Keep eating. Just listen."

Yui nodded, a little anxious.

"What we did yesterday...and sleeping together last night...no one can ever know about that. Is that absolutely clear?"

"Yes, Master."

"If anyone were to find out, if Jupiter were to find out," now Raoul fell silent for a moment, thinking of Iason and Riki. "I think it would just be a matter of time before Jupiter intervened. I think you know... that wouldn't be good, for either of us."

Yui nodded.

"I'm putting you in danger, Yui, by what I intend to do. After yesterday, I've decided," now his voice trailed off as he gazed steadily at Yui.

The innocent brown-haired youth stared back with wide eyes, heart pounding.

"I've decided that I'm going to take you." These words were almost whispered, Raoul's eyes betraying his urgency.

Yui could hardly believe what he was hearing. It was something he had fantasized about...for years. "Master Raoul," Yui said, bowing his head, "I...will do everything in my power to please you. Please forgive...my inexperience, and my...inadequacies."

Now it was Raoul's turn to feel surprised, at Yui's complete submission to him, at his endearing apology, and at the gentle look in his eyes. Suddenly, he didn't want to wait another moment. Rising, he took two steps and was by Yui's side, lifting him up and carrying him to the bedroom, where he laid him on the bed, then slid on top of him.

"Am I crushing you?"

"I don't mind," Yui replied.

The Blondie looked at him for a moment, then kissed him, slowly, savoring the taste of his mouth, his tongue swirling round and round in an intoxicating lingual dance that sent Yui's head

spinning and his heart pounding. He had never been kissed, before Raoul, and he felt a little overwhelmed.

Raoul broke away, kissing his neck and nibbling on his ear.

Yui gasped.

"You like that?" Raoul whispered.

The beautiful youth nodded.

"Now you do it to me." Raoul rolled onto his back, waiting.

"Yes, Master," he replied, his words sending a surge to the Blondie's loins. He adored how submissive the boy was, how eager he seemed to please. This suited him perfectly; although he could certainly imagine beating a servant into submission--and enjoying it--in his view, it was more satisfying to be catered to and have his every desire met with a single command immediately obeyed. For all his innocent awkwardness, Yui was managing to give Raoul a massive erection as he gently kissed his throat, his body pressing down on his.

The Blondie ran his hands down Yui's robe, then lifted it to gain access to his bare bottom. The boy startled a little when he grabbed hold of him and spread him apart, sending a shudder of anticipation through Raoul. He knew Yui would be tight, completely unexplored. It would be exquisite for him, although for Yui it would be an entirely different story, and as he considered this he forced himself to rein in his desire to take the boy hard.

Not the first time.

Yui was trembling, which Raoul found completely endearing. "Are you frightened?" he asked, running his hand through his soft, longish hair.

"A little," he conceded.

Raoul stroked him for a few minutes, smiling. "I will try to be gentle with you," he promised. "But I won't lie to you--it will hurt."

"Ye..yess, Master," Yui stammered.

Moving two fingers up to the boy's mouth, Raoul prodded his lips open. "Suck on my fingers." Yui obeyed, a little bewildered, his expression making the Blondie almost laugh. He was delighted with the boy's complete lack of experience. Then, raking his hands down

his back and then between his legs, the Blondie found his entrance and slid a finger inside, moaning when he felt its breathtakingly tight grip resisting his every move.

Yui gasped, his eyes wide. "Master!"

"Yes?" Raoul whispered, wiggling his finger a little.

"That...that is...is...a special place," he finished, anxiously.

"Oh yes. Quite special," Raoul agreed, then laughed a little. "Do you mean to say, after all the pets you've seen copulating together, you didn't realize where they penetrated?"

"No, Master," Yui admitted, ashamed. He had absolutely no real understanding of sexuality or even of his own physiology.

"You really are untouched, aren't you?" Raoul breathed, now quite painfully aroused. He inserted a second finger into the youth, eliciting another gasp.

"Are you sure that's right?" Yui asked, panicked.

Raoul laughed. "Are you doubting my sexual knowledge, Yui?" he asked, sternly.

"No, Master Raoul," came the lightning fast reply. "Forgive me."

"Good." The Blondie shook a finger in his face. "Otherwise I might have to punish you."

"Pu..punish me?"

"That's right. Naughty boys who doubt their Masters get spanked." To prove his point, Raoul smacked Yui on his ass, then began thrusting slowly with his fingers.

"Ah!" Yui yelped, both from the spank and the anal stimulation. "But...are you sure...you want to be in there?" He was painfully embarrassed and worried that somehow his Master was quite mistaken, that there was another entrance down there he was overlooking, and there were certain things... that he did not want his master to...perceive.

Raoul answered this with another spank. "Hush now. I'm trying to get you ready."

"Ma...master?"

"Yes?"

“I don't think...that it will fit,” Yui whispered, anxiously.

A low laugh escaped the Blondie's lips. “I assure you, I will make it fit. Now, I'm going to get some oil, and that will help me slide in.” Raoul withdrew his fingers and rolled Yui onto his back, then got up and retrieved a bottle of sex oil.

“Get undressed,” he commanded, as he did the same.

Yui obeyed, and then looked up at him with wide eyes, his entire body now shaking. He was excited to be with his master and yet terrified, feeling as though he wasn't sure what was going to happen next. His eyes moved to Raoul's immense erection. Surely...his master was mistaken. How could he possibly fit...THAT...somewhere so small?

Raoul studied Yui's body with interest; he was beautifully toned, his skin fair and delicate. He looked for signs of scarring but found none; his modification had been done exceptionally well, yet he could not help but wish he could have seen Yui completely intact--as he would have been, had he not chosen to be his Furniture.

“Hold out your hand,” he whispered, then poured a generous amount of oil into it, guiding his hand to his erection. Yui needed no further instruction, having watched his master oil himself countless times. With confident strokes he lubricated him well.

“Ohhh,” Raoul groaned. “That's it.” It felt so good he was tempted to spend himself, but the thought of what awaited him proved even more enticing.

“All right. Turn over now...on your tummy.”

Yui obeyed, a meek little “Yes, Master,” escaping from his lips as he did so.

Excited, Raoul gazed down at the boy's firm, perfectly curved ass, his heart now beating so hard he could hear it in his ears. He got onto the bed, spreading Yui's legs with his knees. He could feel the boy shaking, which sent another surge of blood to his loins. With trembling fingers, he squeezed the head of his shaft between his cheeks, pressing until he found his entrance.

“Hold still,” the Blondie commanded. “You're going to feel this part the most.” With that, he forced himself past the resisting portal, managing to get the tip of his head inside. Yui cried out in agony, stopping him. “It's in you now...but not very far.”

“It hurts,” he whimpered.

“I know. Just tell me when you're ready.” Raoul closed his eyes, fighting back a dreadfully powerful urge to plunge into the boy completely.

After a moment, Yui quieted. “Ready, Master.”

Raoul needed no further prompting. He advanced a little further, causing another cry of anguish. He reached down and stroked Yui's hair, wanting to comfort him yet desperately wanting to continue.

“Yui,” he said, finally. “I can't wait any more.”

“Master...do whatever pleases you most,” came the soft reply.

Groaning, Raoul closed his eyes and, taking hold of his hips, began his complete descent into his depths, sliding in quickly to get it over with. Yui's cries were heartbreaking and he stopped, once fully inside, and lay on top of him. “Shhh,” he soothed. “It's all right. I'm inside you now.” He stroked Yui's hair as the boy struggled, unsuccessfully, not to cry. “Let it out. Go ahead.” Encouraged by his master's gentle words and touch, the boy sobbed out his pain.

After a few moments, the discomfort dissipated, and Yui quieted again, sniffing.

Raoul, who had been waiting patiently for Yui to adjust to him, was now itching to begin his conquest. Slowly, he began thrusting, and while the boy gasped and winced, he sensed that he was loosening up--although from his perspective he had never felt anything so tight as Yui's reluctant embrace. Not even Riki was so small. The boy gripped him beautifully, exquisitely--mercilessly.

Moaning, he now began taking the virgin youth in earnest, each thrust a little harder than the one before.

Yui had stopped crying out and was now gasping, confused. What his master was doing...felt good. “Ohh,” he breathed, quietly.

Raoul heard him clearly. "You like this now, do you?" Now he began plunging into him, his own needs taking over.

"Uhh," Yui grunted, excited. "I like it...Master."

"Jupiter help me," the Blondie whispered, then moaned. "Oh, Yui...you're so tight...I can't...I can't wait any long--ohhhhh!" He vocalized his release loudly as he reached his peak, ejaculating hard and with such intensity he squeezed his eyes shut, feeling as though he would burst from the pleasure. He fell forward onto Yui's back, panting.

Beneath him, Yui was smiling, savoring the intimate moment he had just shared with his Blondie master.

"Sweet mother of Amoi," Raoul groaned, realizing in that moment that he had just had the best sexual experience of his life, not with Iason, not even with Riki or another pet, but with Yui, his Furniture, a coupling so forbidden Jupiter would have them both neurologically reconfigured if she knew.

And...he didn't care. Jupiter be damned...he wanted Yui. It had all happened so quickly and yet, he realized now, that his interest in Yui had been building over the years, something that he had repressed and probably never would have confronted directly had he not crossed another forbidden line and copulated with Riki. For the first time, he finally understood Iason's attachment to his mongrel pet, and why he seemed so willing to risk everything to keep him. Now, for both of them, there was only one thing that stood in the way of what they both wanted.

Jupiter.

Iason's Promise

Another drink in hand to ease his pain, Iason donned a silk robe and situated himself in a chair where he could see Riki still tied to the bed in the next room, but far enough away that his pet would know he had left. He was angry, yes. But mostly...hurt. Although by now he was accustomed to the mongrel's sharp tongue and nasty jibes, this time Riki's words twisted his heart, sending his mind reeling with a thousand thoughts.

His headache had been worsening all night; now it was unbearable. He closed his eyes, fingers pressed to his temples. He had taken an Opiate-6 and when that hadn't worked, a second. It occurred to him that the combination of both opiates with hard liquor was probably unwise, yet he was too preoccupied with Riki to really be too concerned.

Sighing, he thought again about his pet's words. Perhaps...if he gave Riki what he wanted, he could win the mongrel's heart. Would it really be so terrible to allow him a night with his old pairing partner? Maybe even a week...one week of freedom, just to stretch his legs a bit. Although the thought of Riki with Guy tore him up with jealousy, it was worse to see his pet so depressed, so bitter about his situation.

And Iason was beginning to think he would never really tame Riki. Perhaps Raoul was right...a mongrel simply couldn't be tamed. Without inbred constraints, there was nothing to curb rebellious behavior, except discipline--and Riki had proved remarkably resistant to change, despite frequent and severe punishment. Deep inside, the Blondie almost admired his pet for refusing to bend to

his will. Every time he had forced him into submission, Riki had eventually come back fighting as though he had never even been punished at all.

Finally...his headache was dissipating...he was starting to relax. He finished his drink and then, rising, made his way back into the bedroom.

Riki startled when he heard the sound of his master approaching. He knew he was in for some serious punishment and had started to tremble. Iason walked over to the side of the bed and sat down, his hair brushing against Riki's back.

His master's eerie silence, coupled with his own pressing need produced a rather unfortunate result--much to his complete mortification, Riki became incontinent.

"Oh fuck," he whispered. "I'm...sorry...Iason. I didn't mean to...but I just wet myself."

Iason noted his pet's condition with no judgment; although it was unusual for Riki, he was not the first pet who had done it. When the Blondie master felt the need to reprimand or discipline a pet, it was not uncommon for such a thing to occur. For Riki, however, his inability to control his own bladder in the face of fear filled him with humiliation and shame.

To his complete surprise, Iason then removed his blindfold and untied him, gently. "Go clean yourself up," he said, softly.

Rubbing his wrists with relief, Riki studied his master, a little bewildered with his change of mood. He wanted to apologize but couldn't quite bring himself to do it.

"Please, don't call Katze. I'll clean it up," he pleaded.

"Very well," Iason conceded, smiling slightly at Riki's endearing expression, so desperate that his accident not be made publicly known.

His gratitude conveyed with a heart-stopping smile, Riki turned and started for the shower, then stopped, turning to look back. "Maybe you could join me...in a few minutes," he offered with a seductive grin.

Pleased, though a little surprised at his pet's sudden change of mood, Iason returned the smile, fully intending to take Riki up on his offer. He rose, leaving the bedroom and making for a chair, when suddenly he felt that something was terribly wrong.

It was as though he had become disconnected from his body. He could not understand how to move his legs, and the room had begun to sway and spin. In that moment he realized that he had made a fatal error by taking two opiates.

He could not stand, nor speak. As he fell, his mind collapsed around a final message to his pet. "O-6--two. Mistake. I love you, Riki."

Riki was marveling over Iason's sudden kindness and understanding over his little mishap, anxious for him to join him so he could show his gratitude properly. Humming a little off-key tune as he enjoyed the warmth of the shower, he was suddenly startled when a thought pressed into his mind--no, a message. From Iason. Riki froze as his master's voice sounded in his head. He immediately knew that Iason was in trouble.

Dashing out of the shower without even turning the water off, his fears were confirmed when he encountered the Blondie sprawled out on the floor.

"Iason!" he screamed, rushing over to him. Falling to his knees, he shook him, desperately trying to rouse him. "Iason! Iason!"

The Blondie was completely unresponsive.

"Katze! Odi!" Riki screamed.

Within seconds, both men came rushing into the room. Although Katze had restrained Odi many times from entering to investigate the suspicious sounds and cries coming from Riki's suite, he knew this cry was different because he addressed them by name.

When they apprehended Iason's lifeless body on the floor, both men immediately knelt down to examine him.

"What happened?" Katze demanded, almost angrily.

Riki, still naked and dripping wet from the shower, shook his head. "I don't know. But he was drinking and...Katze, I think he took two O-6s."

“Holy shit. Riki. Are you sure?”

Riki nodded, remembering Iason's message. “Yes. He took two.”

“Odi! Call the medics! I'll get my kit.” Katze rose, then dashed out of the room.

Attracted to the commotion in Riki's suite, Enyu now appeared, stopping dead in his tracks when he saw his fallen master.

“What's wrong with him?” Enyu asked, frightened.

“We think he's overdosed.”

Enyu, while concerned for his master, now could not help but notice that Riki was dripping wet...and deliciously naked. He took in the mongrel's impressive body with obvious delight, his eyes widening.

Riki was oblivious to the voyeur, desperately trying to rouse Iason. “Come on, now. Wake up. Iason. Open your eyes.” He leaned close, brushing the hair from his master's face. “Iason. Please...I love you so much. Please don't leave me.”

Katze returned with his emergency kit, something he had learned to keep nearby for just such a pharmaceutical mishap. He flicked the injection with his fingers and then proceeded to administer it directly into his vein.

“What is that?” Riki asked, anxiously.

“An opiate blocker. Hopefully it will reverse the effects of the Sixes. If it's not too late.”

Now Riki, hearing these last words, uncharacteristically began weeping. “Iason, please. Please wake up.”

Katze noted Riki's emotional state with some surprise, but said nothing. Perhaps Daryl was right. Perhaps Riki did love Iason, after all.

Enyu similarly was a little surprised by Riki's outpouring of emotion, given his usual rebellious, almost aloof attitude toward his master. Though he had witnessed an extraordinarily intimate moment in the pool early that evening, he had assumed the mongrel was simply aroused by Iason's irresistible sexual presence. That

Riki actually felt something for Iason--perhaps even loved him--put an entirely different spin on his view of the infamous Riki the Dark.

Leaning close to his master's face, Riki began whispering his name, over and over, begging him to open his eyes.

As if responding to his pleas, Iason's eyes fluttered and then opened. The look on his pet's face was priceless; tear-stained worry suddenly transformed into relief and joy. "Iason!" he cried.

The Blondie smiled, treasuring the moment. He had never seen Riki look upon him with such concern or love, and it filled his heart to the brim, healing the evening's wounds.

Riki instinctively bent down and kissed his master on the cheek. "I was so worried. Holy shit--you scared the fucking crap out of me." With shaking fingers he stroked Iason's face. "If anything had happened to you...fuck...I thought you were going to die."

"Would that have been so great a tragedy?" Iason asked, softly.

"What? Of course it--what the fuck kind of thing is that to say? Yes it would have been a fucking tragedy!"

"Then you care for me, Riki?"

Now Riki leaned closer. "You know I do. You know I love you. Shit. You made me say it in front of Katze and cat-boy."

Katze smiled at this, but Enyu was simply transfixed by the romantic scene unfolding before him.

"Riki," Iason sighed, closing his eyes. He pulled him close and they lay there in a love embrace until the medical team arrived and pushed Riki aside to examine Iason.

"He's okay," one of the medics proclaimed, nodding toward Katze's kit. "You're lucky you had that injection. Anyone else would be dead."

Katze nodded. He knew perfectly well how dangerous the opiates were, which was why he always kept the kit close at hand.

Enyu's sharpened senses had picked up on something odd, and he now noticed the wet spot on the bed. He smiled, realizing that Riki had most likely wet the bed, feeling armed with some useful information.

Iason got up, shrugging off the medics' assistance but allowing Riki to help him up. As if on cue, everyone else left the scene, leaving master and pet to a night of intimacy and romance that they had never before shared. All of Riki's inhibitions were gone and he confessed his love freely, granting Iason just what he had waited so long to hear. They lay together for hours, talking.

"Iason. When I was in the shower...I heard your voice in my head."

"What did you hear?"

"You said...you said, 'Two O-6s. Mistake. I love you, Riki.' Something like that. Anyway I knew you were in trouble."

Iason nodded. "I tried to send you a message," he said, thoughtfully.

"Iason. Do you think--this is the third time something like this has happened...I think we have a psychic link."

"The third time?"

"Yes. Oh...the second time...was earlier this evening. When I was in the garden, I felt...your sadness and anger."

Iason thought about this for a moment. "I did not try to communicate with you then," he said. "But I did try to send you a message before I collapsed."

"I think we should develop it...this link thing. Wouldn't that be cool?"

The Blondie laughed. "It might be interesting," he conceded.

"Okay, what am I thinking?" Riki asked, squinting his eyes shut dramatically.

Iason smiled. "I don't know, pet."

"Fuck! You're not trying."

"Come here," Iason whispered, pulling him close, and then stroking his cheek. "Riki, there is nothing in this world that means more to me, than you."

"I know," Riki said, with a rakish grin.

"And...you love me?" Iason pressed, longing to hear his pet say it again.

“For the hundredth time, yes, I fucking love you,” Riki replied, then, in a softer voice. “I have...for a long time.”

Sighing, Iason pulled him close again. “Riki,” he breathed. “I’ve decided...to give you what you asked for.”

“Huh?” Riki pulled away, looking at Iason’s face with surprise. “You mean...?”

“One week. I’m giving you one week of freedom. To stretch your legs...and,” now his voice lowered, a little sadly, “whatever else.”

“Seriously?” Riki was so excited he leapt to his feet. An entire week of freedom? “What about my pet ring?”

“I’ll remove it. For that week only.”

“When?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Oh...Iason,” Riki now choked back tears, looking at his master with such love and gratitude that the Blondie’s heart melted.

“Does that please you, pet?” he whispered, softly.

Riki could not even reply. Wiping a stray tear from his cheek, he stared down at his beautiful Blondie master, feeling his love deepen beyond bearing. He had never, in his wildest dreams, imagined that Iason would actually grant his request. And he was giving him more than the one night he had asked for. An entire week of freedom. He knew that Iason did so with great reluctance, and that made him appreciate the gesture even more.

The Blondie, although saddened at the thought of his pet pursuing his old pairing partner, could not help but be moved by Riki’s reaction to his decision. And his pet had confessed his love. Surely, whatever happened in one week could not change that.

Riki was too excited to sleep and for hours kept Iason awake with his tossing. He grabbed hold of him from behind and pulled him close. “Settle down. You need your sleep, pet.”

“I can’t sleep.”

“Try, or I shall spank you.”

Riki smiled at this teasing threat, snuggling back into Iason’s warm embrace. “Did I ever tell you...I love the way you smell?” he

whispered, breathing in the Blondie's intoxicating scent. "You smell like...I don't know...exotic places and faraway dreams."

Iason chuckled at this, pleased with his pet's compliment. "You have your own distinctive scent, too," he whispered, nibbling on his ear. Riki sucked in his breath in response. "Sex and rebellion and pets who need spankings."

Riki laughed. "You really get a thrill out of spanking me, don't you?"

"Yes," Iason admitted freely.

"What are you going to do when I'm gone, spank Enyu?"

"If necessary."

"You," Riki said, after a moment's pause, "can take Enyu, when I'm gone. If you need to."

Iason smiled at his pet's "permission" to take his own pet. "Is that so?" he whispered, snuggling closer.

"Yeah," Riki replied, a little uncertainly. "But make him whimper."

Iason laughed, squeezing Riki so tight that the mongrel protested.

Eventually they both fell asleep, both feeling equally content with how the evening had finally turned out in the end.

Riki slowly came into awareness after a night of extraordinarily strange dreams. But his last dream was decidedly erotic, and he fought to stay asleep as he felt the strings of awakening pulling on him. He dreamed of Iason...and Guy, and in the dream he could somehow have them both in an impossible arrangement only encountered in the world of dreams.

Something...was not right. Opening his eyes, he slowly focused on Enyu.

The Xeronian stared down at him, eyes completely dilated in their strange elliptical shape, his gold-flecked light green irises just edging the dark center, giving him a completely inhuman look. His hair was tousled widely, his mouth open, and he was leering at him. He was completely naked, encouraging an immense erection with

one hand, crouched on the bed like an animal ready to spring, one hand tensely touching the mattress.

“Holy shit,” Riki breathed. He realized then that Enyu had pulled the sheets from his body and was now admiring his naked form, fondling himself.

“Don't move,” Iason whispered. “He's rutting.”

Disobeying Iason's mandate, Riki turned to see Iason similarly displayed, his beautiful naked body sprawled on the bed. The Blondie was fully aroused.

Riki then realized he was aroused, too.

“What do we do?”

“I should have chained him up last night,” Iason cursed himself, feeling a little angry for failing to do so.

“Yeah, but...what do we do now?”

“Enyu,” Iason said sharply. “What are you doing? Go back to your room this instant.”

Cat-boy responded to this command by laughing, a low, sensual laugh that gave both master and pet chills. Now Enyu started crawling toward Iason, who remained frozen, feeling unable to resist. His lips parted, his heart began pounding, and he gasped when Enyu raked his nails down his body.

“Hey!” Riki objected, lunging for him. “Get off him, you little prick!”

Enyu turned and tackled Riki, pressing his body against him and biting his neck, gently, then finding his mouth and kissing him with such urgency that the mongrel could not help but respond. He found that he could not repel Enyu's advances--nor could he bring himself to encourage them--and so he lay either limply or with his hands frozen mid-air, like a doll.

The Xeronian kissed his throat again, twisting his left nipple as if knowing instinctively where the mongrel's erogenous zones were, and then began advancing down his body, from his chest, to his abdomen, his final destination clear.

Riki looked helplessly at Iason. "I can't...I don't want to...stop him." He was near tears, unable to understand what was going on or why he wanted cat-boy to continue.

"Just let it happen, pet," Iason soothed, now lying on his side, watching the unfolding scene with fascination. He stroked himself, painfully aroused--wanting to join in but feeling compelled to resist because of a promise he had once made Riki. But he also knew that if Riki hadn't stopped Enyu, he would not have been able to resist the Xeronian's advances.

"I...don't want to," Riki whispered, weakly.

Enyu moved lower, now tormenting him with a tantalizing flick of his tongue along his shaft and head.

"Make him stop," he pleaded.

"Just relax." Iason now sat up on his elbow, excited, eyes glowing.

Enyu then took the mongrel in his mouth. Riki cried out, thrilled with the stimulation but not wanting it--not from cat-boy. But then Enyu demonstrated that he had a very special gift. His tongue and mouth became a sanctuary for erotic communion, and Riki responded to his compelling arts with a series of shudders, gasps, and moans--until he began to moan continuously.

"Iason, please," he gasped. "I don't want to come...not in his mouth. Please."

Not needing further invitation, Iason gently pushed Enyu away, assuming his position between the mongrel's legs.

"I'm sorry," Riki mumbled, "you...you're going to get a mouthful."

Iason smiled up at his pet. "You taste like honey to me, my love. I would drink you dry if I could."

Riki responded to this with another moan, and as Iason took him into his mouth and gazed up at him seductively, waiting, he released, spasms of pleasure racketing through his body. Iason closed his eyes and drank, truly relishing his pet's sex.

Enyu watched this exchange with obvious pleasure, continuing to fondle himself. When Iason had finished and rose up, Enyu

turned around and, on hands and knees, offered himself enticingly. "Please take me, Master," he purred.

With a sharp intake of his breath, Iason regarded this invitation with temptation, his lust-filled eyes betraying his desire.

"Go ahead," Riki whispered, still relaxed from his orgasm and knowing that his master desired it.

Iason needed no further prompting, immediately positioning himself behind the Xeronian and taking him without preparation--a little roughly, because of his urgency. Yet Enyu remained submissively positioned, despite his cries of pain--which quickly changed to cries of pleasure because of the pet's special aroused state.

"Harder," he hissed, and Iason was happy to oblige him.

"Your tightness pleases me," Iason said, in Xeronian.

"I want to please you," Enyu answered in the same tongue, thrilled that his master had opted to speak Xeronian.

"Put your head down closer to the bed."

"Master wants to fuck me deep," Enyu replied, happily obeying his command.

"You're gripping me like a hot hand, little pet. I like hearing you cry out."

"What the fuck are you two saying?" Riki demanded, a little annoyed but at the same time fascinated by Iason's sexy, deep voice uttering such a strange, almost erotic language.

Enyu now began stroking himself, ready to ascend to his peak.

"Riki," Iason panted. "Why don't you...get under Enyu and return his favor."

"What!" Riki cried, although he was already--amazingly--sporting a new erection, and was secretly longing to join in.

"Give the boy some relief."

"Oh...all right." Sighing with deliberate exaggeration, the mongrel crawled over and slid under Enyu.

"This is awkward," he complained, fondling Enyu a bit as he tried to get closer.

“Yes, Riki...good Riki,” Enyu gasped, thrilled that the beautiful mongrel had joined them. “Mouth...please...mouth.”

“Yeah, yeah.” Wiggling in under Enyu and then getting up on his elbows in the most uncomfortable position possible, he began pleasuring Enyu, stopping when the Xeronian immediately cried out with pleasure.

“I'm not swallowing you,” he warned. “And no face-shots, either, you little punk.”

“Keep...going,” Enyu pleaded.

Riki obliged him, taking his throbbing fullness into his skilled mouth, deciding that if he was going to suck off cat-boy, he might as well do it right. As he began wiggling his tongue, Enyu became extremely vocal. “Riki...so good,” he whimpered.

Iason was beside himself with pleasure at seeing both pets copulating while he enjoyed the tight depths of a Xeronian in heat. Shuddering, he felt his ascent come on suddenly. He ejaculated hard, groaning, while beneath him Enyu similarly released, pushed over the edge by the sound of his master's rapture.

Riki spit out his semen. “Fuck! I said not in my mouth, you retard!”

“Sorry Riki...I could not...resist.”

“Yeah, well.” Riki wiped his mouth, disgusted.

“You don't like to drink it?”

“Not YOURS.”

Iason smiled a little at this exchange, knowing full well that Riki always swallowed--except, of course, in the very beginning, when he had resisted him in this every step of the way. In fact, the mongrel's refusal to swallow had resulted in many a discipline session until, finally, one amazing day, he had done so without coercion and had cooperated ever since.

“Odi!” Iason called.

The towering, dark bodyguard rushed into the room, and took in the scene with a look of amused intrigue.

“Help me restrain Enyu. We need to chain him up.”

Upon hearing this, Enyu immediately began resisting, and it took all three of them--master, pet, and bodyguard--to drag him to the hall where he was promptly chained by the neck, his wrists and ankles also manacled.

Enyu howled his protest.

"Cease that wretched sound at once," Iason commanded, "or I will gag you and beat you."

At this, Enyu became quiet.

"What happened this morning...will not happen again, Enyu. The sexual activity of this household will not be determined by your rut."

Enyu only smiled at this, saying nothing.

Now Iason became aware that all three of them were still naked, and he quickly went to his room to get dressed, looking over at Riki.

"Get dressed."

Riki ignored this mandate for a moment, staring at cat-boy, who grinned at him eerily as he began coddling another erection.

"This doesn't mean we're best friends or anything," Riki said, coolly.

Enyu answered something in Xeronian that the mongrel didn't understand.

"What is that, cat-boy language? Speak Amoian, you dipswitch."

Iason, now dressed in his silk house trousers, answered that with a hard smack to his bare bottom. "I said, get dressed. And what he said was he didn't need any friends, only more good lovers like you."

"Hmphf," Riki snorted, although feeling a little flattered. He went off to his room to dress, shaking his head at the way the day had begun.

Katze now came into the hall, walking a little stiffly but looking good. Iason nodded at him.

"Master Iason," he mumbled, confused when he saw the table already laid with breakfast. "Who made breakfast?"

“Tai. Our...new chef. He'll be taking over all kitchen duties,” Iason said matter-of-factly.

Katze had been worried about resuming his duties and felt sure that he had missed an entire day, at least. He had some recollection of a commotion in Riki's room the previous night and wondered if he had dreamed it...had Iason overdosed? He was amazed that no one had insisted he get up and attend to anything. Seeing Enyu masturbating in the great hall, he nodded.

“I see you remembered to chain him up.”

“Actually...we had a little...encounter in the bedroom this morning first.”

Katze smiled a little. “So...I was right?”

“Yes,” Iason conceded. “He was quite...irresistible.”

Pleased with this compliment, Enyu beamed, now pumping himself faster. Katze and Iason regarded him for a moment.

“He'll probably be like this for the next few days. You might want to give him a towel...or something,” Katze advised.

“See to it. Katze?”

“Yes?”

“Today you will pick up Daryl from the hospital.”

Brightening at this, Katze nodded, then edged toward the table. “I smell coffee.”

“Sit down, help yourself. Odi--you, too.”

“What about Askel and Freyn?”

“I already have plate,” Tai announced, rushing out from the kitchen, carrying two trays to the waiting bodyguards, who looked at the proffered gourmet meal with surprise.

Enyu whimpered a little from the corner, feeling ravished and ignored.

Smiling, Iason turned to Tai. “Something for Enyu, too.”

Excited, the Xeronian prepared to settle down to breakfast by ejaculating, his cries drawing everyone's attention. Katze left the hall and returned with two towels, one wet and one dry, tossing them to the chained pet, who accepted them gratefully, feeling rather in need of a good shower.

Iason, Katze and Odi sat down at the table. Riki came into the hall dressed in his street clothes, the very ones he had been wearing the night Iason first met him. The sight of his pet so attired brought a look of sadness to the Blondie's face as he remembered his promise to Riki. The mongrel, seeming to sense his master's sudden change of mood, pacified him with a kiss to the cheek before settling down beside him. "Good morning, Master," he said, softly, almost seductively.

Iason smiled at this, pouring his pet a glass of juice. "Drink this."

"I want coffee," Riki protested, adding, when Iason shot him a warning look, "Master."

"Juice first," Iason said firmly.

Katze was so excited he could hardly eat. "When should I go to the hospital?" he asked, finally.

"As soon as you are ready."

"I'm ready now," Katze replied, immediately rising.

Iason eyed Katze's empty plate and half-finished cup of coffee, but said nothing, smiling slightly. "Very well."

Thrilled, Katze left the table, rushing back to Daryl's room to grab his keys.

"Oh! Daryl's coming home today?" Riki asked, as Katze came back into the room.

Katze answered this with a smile.

"Can I go with you?" Riki begged, excited.

"No, pet," Iason said, softly, touching his hand. "You'll see him soon enough, and I want you here with me today." Katze shot Iason a grateful look, glad for some time with Daryl alone, much as he usually enjoyed Riki's company.

Riki now remembered the day's promise, and wondered when Iason would set him free. He hummed a little to himself in such an endearing manner that his master reached over and kissed his cheek. "Are you happy, pet?"

"Yes, Master," Riki mumbled, his mouth full.

"This food is superb," Odi announced.

Tai beamed at the compliment, bowing from where he stood near the kitchen, watching them eat.

“Yes, Tai. Quite excellent,” Iason agreed. Katze had not been a bad cook, not in the least, but there was nothing quite like having a true chef in the kitchen.

“It's fucking awesome,” Riki concurred. “Can I have some coffee now, Master?”

“Yes, pet,” Iason answered, pouring him a cup.

“I'm off, then,” Katze said, giving Riki a little wink.

Riki grinned, and Iason gave him a slight nod.

It was all Katze could do to keep from running down the hall the elevator, cursing at its slowness as it descended gently floor after floor. He was so desperate to see Daryl, he could hardly contain himself. Already he had the day planned; he would take Daryl to his apartment and love him for a few hours before bringing him back to the penthouse. He couldn't wait to try out his new toys with his lover.

In traffic he drove like a maniac, even more than usual, illegally passing any vehicle he perceived to be too slow--which ended up being every vehicle he encountered. Ignoring the angry shots and blaring horns, he sped on by, flipping off a few particularly annoyed drivers here and there.

In just moments, Daryl would be his.

When he arrived at the hospital, he took the stairs rather than wait for the elevator, two and three at a time, arriving on Daryl's floor a little out of breath. He was immediately accosted by the blue-haired lady, who, open perceiving his identity, inexplicably gave him a friendly greeting.

“Oh! Sir Iason's man, isn't it? Daryl is quite ready to go and doing very well, I assure you.”

Katze blinked, surprised by the sudden change in the women's attitude, but too excited to see Daryl to give it much thought.

“This way,” she said, as though he needed instructions on how to get to Daryl's room. “He's been ready since early this morning.”

Katze followed her and then passed her by when they approached the room, anxious to see his lover.

Daryl was sitting in a chair by the window, gazing out almost sadly.

“Daryl!”

Daryl turned and, seeing him, broke into a smile. “Katze.”

“Are you ready to go, love?”

“Ready.” He stood up, reaching for his small bag of belongings, which Katze immediately seized.

“I've got it. Let's go.” He put an arm around Daryl, bending down to give him a kiss on the cheek.

Daryl smiled.

“Give my regards to your Master,” the blue-haired lady said. “Be sure and tell him he's most welcome to come by and visit, any time.”

Katze stared at the women, perplexed. “Yeah. All right,” he muttered, brushing by her in his haste to get Daryl all alone.

He practically carried Daryl down the hall to the elevator, and once inside, he immediately pressed him up against the wall, kissing him so passionately that Daryl began gasping for air.

“Katze!”

“I can't get enough of you,” Katze apologized. “I'm taking you to my place, love. I must have you.”

Daryl answered this by running his fingers through Katze's hair, encouraging his intoxicating kiss.

The door to the elevator opened and Katze dragged Daryl out of the building.

“Katze,” Daryl laughed. “Slow down.”

Katze turned and, with impossible ease, scooped Daryl up in his arms, carrying him to the car. Daryl giggled the entire way.

Setting him down on his feet, Katze pressed a finger to his nose. “Now, stop complaining or I'll have to spank you. Actually I might just spank you anyway, for fun.”

Delighted, Daryl slid his hands to Katze's waist, pulling him close.

A little surprised with Daryl's assertiveness, but thrilled, Katze groaned. "Oh, Daryl." He kissed him again, hungrily. "I've missed you so much." He bent down and bit Daryl's neck, eliciting a sharp cry that turned heads.

"Get in the car," he commanded.

Daryl obeyed, turning to look at Katze as he drove, again like a wild man, through the streets of Tanagura. They were silent for most of the trip, staring at one another, both of them breathing a little hard.

When they reached Katze's apartment, only a few minutes away, Katze leapt out of his side and, as soon as Daryl got out, lifted him up again and carried him into the house, immediately making for the bedroom, where he tossed him on the bed.

"Undress," he commanded.

Smiling, Daryl proceeded to obey him while Katze watched, hands on hips.

"Aren't you getting undressed?" he asked.

Katze answered this by ripping off his shirt and throwing it aside, then unzipping his pants and pulling them off. He reached down and picked up something that Daryl had not noticed lying on the bed and proceeded to strap it on, fastening it at his waist and then lower, on his hips. In the center of his pelvis an oval-shaped plate now hung. With a flip of a switch the plate made a soft hum, glowing red.

"What's that?" Daryl gasped.

Katze smiled, tossing a similar device to him. "Put it on."

"But...what is it?"

"Obey me! Or I'll have to punish you," Katze threatened with a sexy smile.

"How does it go?" Daryl wondered, fumbling with the straps. Katze climbed onto the bed and helped him with it, then flipped the device on.

"Oh!" Daryl moaned, loudly. "Oh, Katze! I feel...I feel...something!"

“Yes,” Katze grinned. “And you're going to feel a lot more. This is the surprise I told you about.”

“Ah!” Daryl squealed, overwhelmed with the sensations now coursing through his body. “It feels...good!”

Katze answered this by sliding on top of him, kissing him with such passion that Daryl felt as though he were melting in his arms. He slid his hands down Katze's back and then stopped, feeling his lash marks.

“It's true! Iason whipped you! Why didn't you tell me, Katze?” he demanded, suddenly angry.

“Hush,” Katze said, silencing him with another kiss. “It was nothing.”

“That's a lie! I know!” Daryl was near tears.

“I didn't want you to worry,” Katze soothed, running his hands through his hair. “It's over now, love. Forget about it. Love me.”

“But,” Daryl began, but Katze stuck his tongue into his mouth, forcing him to return his kiss. Daryl moaned in his mouth.

“Feels good, doesn't it?” he whispered.

“Yeah,” Daryl conceded. “Yes, it does.”

“Let me try something. Open up,” he said, prodding his fingers into Daryl's mouth. Daryl sucked on him dutifully, and then Katze spread his legs apart with his knees, reaching down to insert a finger as he kissed him.

Daryl arched up against him with pleasure, shivering. Wiggling his finger around a bit, Katze proceeded to bite and kiss his neck.

“Oh!” Daryl shouted suddenly. “Katze, I--I....”

“Let it happen,” Katze whispered, excited.

“I don't know how!”

“Just relax, give into it. Come on, sweetheart.”

“Ahh,” Daryl moaned, closing his eyes.

“That's it. Just like that,” Katze encouraged, kissing and sucking on his neck.

“Ahh, Katze! Something...something's happening.”

“Yes,” Katze breathed. “Let it.” He was now becoming extraordinarily aroused himself, but wanted to wait to hear Daryl come first.

“Ohhh...Katze...ohhhh,” Daryl began writhing, arching his back. “Oh yeah. It's nice...Katze...it's....ahhhh!” With a sudden moan of pleasure, Daryl experienced his first orgasm, a sensation he never could have imagined. Hearing his lover's release, Katze stopped resisting the device and allowed it bring him to his own peak, his entire body shuddering as he groaned his ecstasy.

“We just came,” Daryl said, in disbelief. “Didn't we? How is that possible?”

“Alpha Zen technology,” Katze replied, rolling onto his back with a sigh and pulling Daryl to him. “Did you like it?”

“I loved it!” Daryl answered.

Now Katze kissed his cheek. “There are other things we can try, too. When you're ready. We can attach certain...devices.”

“Really? I want to!” Daryl cried. “Can we try it now?”

“We'd better not,” Katze answered, reluctantly. “There's something I have to tell you. These devices...they're not good for you. They're actually kind of dangerous. That's why they're illegal on Amoi.”

“Oh.” Daryl was disappointed, but somehow not surprised at this news. “Well...I don't regret it.”

“Good,” Katze said, smiling. “I don't either.”

“We just came together...for our first time.” Daryl snuggled closer into Katze's arms.

“Yeah.” Katze smiled, closing his eyes as he held his lover close, feeling as though there was nowhere else in the world he wanted to be.

A Taste of Freedom

Katze pushed his lover back onto the bed, kissing him so passionately that Daryl gasped, his mouth a little bruised.

“Daryl,” he groaned. “I want you so badly. I wish....”

“I know,” Daryl replied, softly. “I do, too.”

Despite the pleasure they had just experienced with the G-wave devices, both of them keenly felt a longing for a deeper intimacy that they simply could not share.

“I've missed you something awful. I've been so worried about you.”

“You have?”

Katze kissed his nose. “Of course, kitten.”

Daryl blinked, smiling. Kitten? He loved Katze's pet names, adored the way he made him feel as though he were the only lover he'd ever had. But of course, he knew that was not the case.

Katze laughed. “Hey. What the hell was up with the blue-haired lady? All of a sudden it was like she was throwing down the red carpet and kissing my ass.”

Daryl smiled. “Oh...Iason charmed her, I think.”

This elicited a low laugh from Katze, who shook his head. “Ah. Iason. He has a way of...doing that.”

“Yeah.” Daryl's smile suddenly faded.

Katze studied him, puzzled. “What is it?”

Shaking his head, he looked away, feeling a bit overcome with emotion.

“Hey.” Katze took hold of his chin to force his attention. “What's up?”

"I said nothing," Daryl replied, almost sharply.

"Don't take that tone with me. I'll bend you over my knee, don't think I won't," he teased. "So spit it out, already."

But the grey-eyed youth stubbornly remained silent.

"All right. That's it," Katze said, assuming a domineering manner that made Daryl giggle. He stood up, hands on his hips, looking down at his lover sternly, a wicked smile curling his upper lip. "You're in for it now."

"Help!" Daryl cried with delight, making a sudden dash for the door.

Katze restrained him with ease, dragging him back to the bed. Daryl was giggling so hard he started to choke.

"You won't think it's so funny when I'm finished with you," Katze warned, then sat down on the edge of the bed and yanked Daryl over his knee. "I'll teach you to mind me, naughty boy."

Thrilled, Daryl waited for his punishment, a little surprised when his lover actually began spanking him rather hard. "Oh! Katze...that hurts," he exclaimed, attempting to wiggle off his knee.

Katze held him down. "It's supposed to hurt."

"Ah! Ah! Ow...that really...hey--OW!"

Katze smiled at Daryl's cries, wanting to push his lover just past the point of fun but not much further.

"Please...ahh!!...stop!"

"Not until you tell me what's on your mind," Katze replied, gifting him with an especially hard spank, which made a nice smacking sound punctuated by a almost comical yelp from his punished lover.

"All right!" Daryl cried. "I'll tell you!"

"You sure can't take much, can you?" Katze laughed, giving him a couple extra spanks before he let him up.

"I can't help it. I'm not used to being spanked." Daryl rubbed his ass, enjoying the burning sensation now that the session was over, and eyeing Katze with admiration. "You're sexy when you're being all Master Katze," he whispered.

“That's right. I'm your master, and you WILL obey me. So come here.” Katze held out his arms, pulling Daryl back with him onto the bed and holding him close for a few minutes “Now. Tell me what's up.”

Daryl sighed, a little grateful to have his face pressed against his lover's chest so he wouldn't have to look into Katze's eyes. “I wanna know...what happened that day. With Iason. You said...you'd tell me when we were alone.”

For a moment Katze remained quiet, then he reached over to the endtable for his smokes, lighting one up as he thought about what to say. “All right,” he said, running his hand through Daryl's hair. “I'll tell you, love.” He exhaled, and Daryl waited, wondering why he was being so mysterious about it. “First let me tell you...something that you probably don't know. When I was Iason's Furniture,” now he pulled Daryl a little closer, “way before I met you,” he whispered, “I was...I was...I guess you could say, I loved him.” He confessed this with a bit of relief, having held the secret in his heart for so many years.

Daryl heard this admission with a sinking feeling, suddenly dreading what else his lover would say.

“But he...never looked at me in that way,” he continued, deciding to omit mentioning the one occasion where Iason had almost seemed to consider him. He took another drag, remembering. “So...when he came over that day to confront me about Serendipity, he told me I was going to be punished. And then he wanted me to...service him. So, for me it was,” now he trailed off, unsure of how to put it.

Daryl was quiet, listening. He already knew that Katze had performed fellatio on Iason; what he wanted to know was why Katze had been so reluctant to talk about it via screen. “You...enjoyed it?” he prompted, a little jealously.

For a moment Katze considered lying to him. Was it really always the best idea to be completely honest? Perhaps there were some things...best kept secret. But then, he hated the idea of

keeping anything from Daryl. Realizing that his silence had already conveyed his answer, he sighed.

"Yes," he admitted, finally. "At least...until he tried to choke me."

Breathing a little faster, Daryl suddenly felt tears sting his eyes, and he tried to move away. Katze grabbed hold of him and pulled him closer. "Shhh," he soothed, "don't be upset."

"Why shouldn't I be upset!" Daryl struggled in his arms, and when Katze momentarily released him to put out his smoke, he leapt up and headed for the door.

"Whoa." Katze jumped up, catching him from behind and holding him. Daryl began pounding his forearms with his fists. "Let me go!"

"Were you planning to leave the apartment naked?" Katze whispered, smiling. "Now, now. What's all this fuss? You know I love you. There's nothing to be jealous of."

"Of course there is!" Daryl shouted. "Let me go, dammit!"

"Hold on. It's just the same...as if you had a chance to be with Yui," he replied, quietly.

Daryl calmed at that, feeling a little embarrassed.

"Yes," Katze whispered in his ear, running a hand down his body. "I know you."

A defeated sound escaped Daryl's lips, a cross between a whimper and a moan.

"I know you're attracted to him. But I also know that you love me, so it doesn't matter. And that's the same way with you. It makes no difference what happened with Iason. It was a...reflex after so many years of fantasy. But...you should know my heart belongs to you." He reached around and took hold of the pendant he had given Daryl, rubbing it between his fingers. "Have you forgotten...that I gave you this?"

Sighing, Daryl let his head fall back against Katze's chest. "I'm...sorry."

"No apologies necessary. Just more good sex. Otherwise spankings and ticklings are on the agenda." Katze illustrated this by nuzzling Daryl's neck, eliciting a shrill squeal of delight from him.

"That tickles!" he protested, giggling.

Katze turned him around, looking down into his eyes. "Don't...ever doubt my love, Daryl," he said, softly, then bent down to offer a long, eagerly accepted kiss. "We'd better get back though," he added, reluctantly.

"Yeah," Daryl agreed, a little nervously, wondering how long they had been fooling around at Katze's apartment.

"Tonight," Katze promised, pointing a finger at him.

"Tonight?"

"Tonight I'm going to make you come so loud Iason will demand to know what's going on."

Daryl smiled, burying his face in his lover's chest. Katze held him close, closing his eyes. For a long time they stood thus, spilling into one another as though they had ceased to be separate beings, but were now one unit--one heart and mind.

* * *

Riki gulped down his breakfast, nearly choking at one point in his impatience to get on with the day. He was so excited that he couldn't sit still, and squirmed restlessly in his chair, tormenting Iason with his fidgeting.

"Sit still," Iason chided. "Don't you know it's considered rude to eat like an animal? Slow down and try chewing before you swallow."

"Please, can I go to my room?" Riki pleaded.

The Blondie glanced at his plate. "You're not finished."

"That's only because I took seconds before I realized how fucking full I am already."

"I should make you clean your plate to teach you the consequences of your greed."

Riki let his head fall forward onto the table, groaning. "Why do I always have to wait for you? You eat so bloody slow."

Iason sighed. "I see teaching you table manners has reached yet another impasse."

"I'm just a vulgar fucking mongrel, whaddya expect?" Riki snipped.

"You're my pet, Riki," he answered, softly, "and as I've told you a thousand times, when you are at the table with me, I expect you to behave in a matter fitting for the pet of an Elite."

"Shouldn't I be chained up in the corner with Enyu then? I thought Elites didn't eat with their pets," he challenged, grinning.

A slight jangling from the corner of the hall announced that Enyu was listening.

"Keep up this insolence and I'll not hesitate to do just that," came the Blondie's firm reply, though he smiled at his pet.

"Please. I wanna shoot some before I go." Riki hadn't played pool in over two years, and he was a little worried that he'd lost his touch. If he was going back to Ceres, he wanted to make a good impression. After all, he still had his reputation to think of.

Iason's expression shifted, and for a brief moment a sadness pressed into his features. In the next instant he had concealed his emotions with a look of impassive acquiescence, nodding to excuse Riki from the breakfast table. The mongrel jumped up and rushed out of the hall without a backward glance at his Blondie master.

Although Iason knew he could not break his promise to Riki, he now wished that he had not agreed to set his pet free for a week. Already images of Riki with this faceless pairing partner, Guy, began to torment him. Even more than that, he was worried. Midas, and its slum Ceres, was a dangerous, vulgar place--he could not help but recall that he had first met Riki when the mongrel was being held down by some Elite bodyguards who would certainly have killed him if Iason hadn't stepped in.

And without his pet ring, Iason would have no idea where Riki was. He had already decided to secretly track him via a hidden tracer; Riki would be furious if he discovered it, but Iason simply had no intention of letting his pet disappear again. Though he was tempted to have Odi or Katze quietly follow him, he knew that Riki

would deeply resent this intrusion into his freedom, as he had no doubt that the mongrel would be quick to discover it.

Most of all, he was going to miss his pet dreadfully. As he considered this, his eyes gravitated to Enyu, who immediately perked up upon apprehending his master's notice. Iason smiled at the Xeronian, who, still completely naked and chained to the taming post, was once again encouraging a healthy erection. Enyu smiled back seductively, hoping for some special attention from his master. But Iason had no intention of spending himself again on Enyu; this would be his last day with Riki for an entire week and he intended to save his lust for a final romp with his pet. Still, it was an undeniable comfort to know that Enyu would be available--and eager--to relieve his needs while Riki was away.

"Does Master want something?" Enyu asked, his eyes dilating.

"Not at this time, little pet," Iason replied, in Xeronian, and then almost laughed at the utter disappointment on Enyu's face. "I'll tell you when I want you," he added.

Enyu embraced this final remark as a promise for future congress, his face lighting up with anticipation. "I want to make you moan, Master," he whispered provocatively.

"I know you do. You're a good little pet, Enyu."

The Xeronian's reaction to this compliment was to immediately increase the pace of his masturbation, throwing back his head with a little groan.

Iason watched, smiling.

At that moment, Askel came in on the intercom to inform Iason that Xian Sama had arrived with Juthian.

"Send them in."

The door hummed open and Xian and Juthian entered. Xian couldn't help but smile at the sight of the chained pet stimulating himself in the corner of the room. Only Iason Mink would have a pet performing at breakfast.

Iason nodded at him. "Xian." His eyes shifted to Juthian, who stood quietly behind his master, eyes down. He was dressed in formal silk robes bound with straps at the waist and a jeweled head-

piece in the style of Aristian royalty. Iason smiled, pleased. A very beautiful boy indeed, and delightfully submissive; exactly what he was looking for in a new Furniture.

“Is that a Xeronian?” Xian asked, intrigued.

“Ah. Yes. A gift from Jupiter.”

“From...Jupiter?” Xian was surprised at this.

Iason nodded. “Odd, isn't it?”

“Yes.” Xian puzzled over this for a moment. Did this mean Iason had gotten rid of his mongrel pet? Or did he have...two pets?

“He's--is he rutting?”

“Most definitely,” the Blondie replied with a laugh.

“Fascinating.” Xian's eyes were continually drawn to Enyu, who now regarded him with unveiled desire. “He's....looking at me,” he added, in a low voice.

Iason regarded Xian for a moment. “You're welcome to enjoy him, if you like. He's quite eager to please.”

Xian was startled at this offer, and simply stared at Iason in disbelief. Of course, everyone knew that Iason took Riki the Dark, but to be invited to copulate with his pet was nothing short of shocking...and exceptionally tempting. “Truly?” he said, finally.

“Most definitely. Go ahead. Would you care for a drink?”

“No—ah...what do you have?”

“Everything.”

Xian laughed at this. “You wouldn't happen to have Augustian cognac?”

“Of course. I also have Ambrosia.”

“Ambrosia?” Xian raised his eyebrows in disbelief. One bottle of Ambrosia cost over 500,000 credits.

“It's quite perfect. Would you like to try it?”

“Yes, please.” Now Xian regarded Enyu again, wondering if he should take Iason up on his offer. This was a decisive moment for the Blondie, who had never taken a pet before, and while he would normally never have even considered it, something about Iason's relaxed attitude and the whole atmosphere of his household made it

seem as though doing so would not be anything so extraordinary, that it was only natural to pair with a pet.

Iason started to pour him a drink and then suddenly remembered Juthian. "Come here, Juthian," he said.

Eyes wide with fear, Juthian approached the formidable Blondie dutifully but hesitantly.

Iason smiled at his apprehensiveness. The boy was absolutely perfect for training.

"This is the bar. The wines are all on the racks here to the left, everything else is here to the right." He pointed out the glasses and showed him how much cognac to put in a glass. "I drink wine," he continued. "Do you know how to open a wine bottle?"

"No, Master," came the soft reply.

Juthian's obedience was charming to the Blondie, who showed him how to uncork a bottle. "Now, take this to Xian." Iason handed him the cognac, and Juthian took it with trembling fingers, afraid to look his new master in the eye, a trait that the Blondie found rather endearing.

As Juthian approached Xian with his drink, he was overcome with feelings of sadness and jealousy. His master was regarding Iason's pet with unguarded interest, and, because he knew him so well, Juthian also knew that Xian was unusually aroused.

"Mast...Sir Xian," he corrected, offering the cognac.

Xian accepted it without a glance at him, which hurt Juthian tremendously. In fact, Xian was painfully aware of Juthian and was trying to appear unconcerned that he was about to leave his favorite pet with Iason Mink, who he had no doubt would toy with Ju in some lewd manner or another, despite his recent modification. To hide his true feelings, he directed his full attention to the Xeronian, whose performance was, in truth, remarkable.

Enyu locked eyes with Xian and, with a seductive gaze, spread his legs further apart to give him a better view as he fondled himself. He liked the look of this Blondie; he was tall—even taller than Iason, and he wore a braid on the side of his hair in a manner that reminded him of the ancient warriors of Xeron, bound with a

beaded tassel. He was extremely well-built and muscular, so much so that Enyu wondered if he had, in fact, been trained as a warrior. His eyes were a stunning golden hue that he had never before seen, and he was extraordinarily handsome, virile in every respect, his every movement eliciting an erotic flexing of his muscles. Enyu had never seen a Blondie in sleeveless attire; Xian wore a cape pinned at the shoulder, leaving a bare, well-sculpted arm exposed that he found especially provocative. With his senses heightened by his interval, Enyu could catch the scent of the Blondie, an intoxicating scent that betrayed his use of expensive grooming products as well as a hint of pre-ejaculatory emissions.

Xian now desperately wanted to accept Iason's offer, but he felt too uncomfortable to engage in such licentious behavior in front of him. He sipped his cognac, his heart beating fast.

Picking up on his ambivalence, Iason walked over to him, and for a moment the two of them simply stood in silence, regarding Enyu, who was now becoming quite vocal, moaning and grunting as he began his final ascent, leaning back on one arm as he thrust his pelvis up into the air, arching his back, now up on his toes with his head thrown back.

“Remarkable.” Xian shook his head.

“This is his third time this morning.”

“Is that so?” The stirring in Xian's loins did not go unnoticed by Iason, who glanced down at his bulge with a slight smile.

“Have you...ever taken a pet before?” Iason whispered.

“No. But,” now Xian lowered his voice, “I confess I have often wanted to.”

“He's quite exceptional. I have plenty of empty suites in the guest wing.”

“Hmmm.” Xian sipped his cognac again, torn between his temptation and a deeply ingrained fear of defying Jupiter's laws. “This...Ambrosia is outstanding. I've never had it before.”

“Ah yes. Everyone must try the very best...at least once.”

Xian smiled a little at Iason's veiled reference. At that moment Enyu ejaculated, crying out so beautifully that shivers ran down the Blondie's back. "Perhaps," he conceded.

"So?"

Xian hesitated for a moment, summoning up his courage. "Very well. I accept your offer."

Iason smiled, then turned to Enyu, who was now lying on the floor, relaxing from his release. "Enyu."

The Xeronian opened his eyes, surprised, and immediately sat up.

"You will go with Xian now and obey his every request," Iason said, unlocking his chain from the floor post.

"Yes, Master," Enyu answered brightly, regarding Xian with a breathtaking smile.

The Blondie's heart was beating so fast he could hardly contain himself. He couldn't believe he was about to take a pet, his most potent fantasy since his early days at the Academy. He only wished it could have been Ju.

Juthian watched this unfolding scene with an overwhelming sadness and a sharp stab of jealousy. His master was truly going to take Iason's pet? It seemed strangely cruel that he would do so... after...after that afternoon a few days before, when Xian had tormented him with such a long, sensual kiss, ironically after Juthian was no longer a man. He regarded the Xeronian with disdain; he hated him already, and it was all he could do to keep from crying out as his master left the hall with Iason and the captivating pet. He struggled, fighting back hot tears that pressed into his eyes, his face and lips tingling.

At that moment Riki sauntered into the hall, then stopped short upon apprehending Juthian.

"Hey," he said. "Who the hell are you?"

Juthian looked up, eyes brimming with tears.

"Fuck. I...I didn't mean," Riki stammered. "Oh. You...must be the new Furniture. I'm...Riki." He stared at him for a moment, puzzling over his face, which was strangely familiar.

"I'm Juthian," came the soft reply.

"You're...hey...you're that pet Raoul whipped!" With the nice ass, he remembered.

"Yes." Juthian lowered his eyes, ashamed.

Riki stared back in disbelief. If Juthian was now Furniture, that meant.... "They modified you?" he whispered.

Juthian nodded, swallowing hard to keep from crying.

"Shit. Those fuckers."

"Master Iason requested it," Juthian replied, his eyes flashing a little.

"That asshole," Riki muttered.

"What's that, Riki?" came Iason's sharp reprimand, as he came up behind his pet.

"Oh. Nothing...we were just talking about...this one guy."

"I heard what you said clearly enough," Iason whispered, pulling Riki's arms behind him. "And...I've made it very clear to you how you are to address me in front of others. It seems you have forgotten." With that, Iason whipped out his taming stick. "Lower your trousers."

"Fuck! I meant Master," Riki pleaded.

"Too late. Three strikes, Riki."

"Dammit," the mongrel muttered, almost inaudibly, unzipping his pants angrily.

The Blondie assisted him by yanking them down and pressing him up against the wall, pinning his wrists up above his head, then administering three wickedly painful strikes to his thighs. Riki gritted his teeth to keep from crying out in front of Juthian, but he was unable to prevent a small sob escaping his lips with the third strike.

Furious, he pulled his pants back up and made to leave the hall.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"Back to...my room, Master," Riki grumbled, hands sunk deep in his pockets. The excitement of the day had been ruined by Iason's taming, however brief, and he was now rather miffed with him. Though he had come into the hall in search of Iason, he no longer

felt like inviting him to shoot pool. He was mortified to have been tamed in front of Juthian on his very first day in the penthouse.

"I don't recall giving you permission to do so."

Riki shot him an exasperated look.

"Don't push me, Riki," Iason said, sternly. "Your release today is contingent upon your good behavior."

With these words, the mongrel's expression swiftly altered. He turned to face the Blondie, eyes wide and innocent. "Please...Ias--Master, please, you're still going to let me go, aren't you?" he pleaded.

"That depends."

Riki stared up at him with an expression so sweet and endearing that Iason could not help but smile at his pet's obvious attempt to persuade him.

"Master. Would you like," now he glanced at Juthian, remembering that he was still standing there, "anything?"

"Go ahead and go to your room. I'll join you there shortly."

Nodding, Riki turned and left the hall, feeling a little anxious that Iason would retract his offer to remove his pet ring and let him leave Eos.

Now Iason turned to Juthian. "Is it clear to you how I reward disobedience in this household, Juthian?"

"Yes, Master," Ju replied, eyes averted.

"Good. I trust...I will not have any difficulties with you?"

"No, Master."

"Then...I will show you to your quarters. This way." With that, Iason turned abruptly and left the hall. Juthian hurried to catch up with him, marveling at the size of the penthouse. They turned down a long corridor and as they passed by one of the rooms, he heard the unmistakable sound of Master Xian in sexual excitement, his groans tormenting him with the knowledge that his former master was engaged within.

* * *

Raoul and Yui remained together the entire night; the Blondie was comforted by the presence of the submissive youth who was so eager to please him, catering to his every wish. They drifted in and out of sleep, each marveling over what had transpired that night whenever they slid into awareness. Yui snuggled back against Raoul's warm naked body, and the Blondie instinctively pulled him closer.

"You were perfect," he whispered into his ear.

Smiling, Yui answered by stroking his master's arms, which were wrapped tightly around him. He had never felt happier in his life; all of his fantasies and longings had led up to this very moment, and even though he could feel Raoul's warmth pressed against him, he could not believe it was real. Master Raoul...had taken him.

Raoul was similarly astonished at what had just transpired. He could not believe that he had engaged in coitus with Yui, nor could he understand his own flood of emotions concerning that event. It was more than just sexual enjoyment; he felt truly comforted by the boy's mere presence. Though he was still hurting from Iason's retribution--mostly in his heart--he found that Yui had significantly lessened his pain.

In fact, it was almost as though his obsession with Iason had been broken, just as his body had been broken, and all his longings had been inexplicably transferred to Yui.

"Did you enjoy it?" he asked, gently.

"Oh! Yes...that is, mostly. I enjoyed giving you pleasure."

Raoul laughed softly, pulling him closer. "Was I very hard on you?"

"A little," Yui admitted. "You are...you have a huge organ."

"And you are exquisitely tight," he growled, biting the boy's neck.

Yui gasped, thrilled.

Raoul shuddered. He wanted to take Yui again but knew he needed time to heal.

Yui felt the stirring of his master against his thighs and instinctively sucked in his breath.

“Yui,” Raoul breathed, now passionately kissing and nibbling his neck and shoulder.

“Are you ready again, Master?”

“I am.” He reached around and took hold of Yui's hand, guiding it back to his developing erection.

Yui fondled his master sweetly with inexperienced but eager fingers, bringing him quickly to full arousal.

Raoul lay back on the bed. “Pleasure me with your mouth,” he commanded.

“Yes, Master.” Yui slid down between the Blondie's legs, pausing for a moment to examine Raoul's immense erection.

His master watched him, amused. “Have you never seen one before?”

“Of course not, Master,” Yui replied, giving him a perplexed look. “Are they all this big?”

Raoul laughed, a loud, deep laugh, a laugh that he had not made for many years. “You are so delightfully naive.”

He reached down and stroked Yui's cheek. “Now...press your lips up against the tip,” he said, his voice lowering with some urgency, “and now...let me feel your tongue, just a little.” He closed his eyes when Yui complied. “Yes...just like that....good boy. Open your mouth more and take me in a bit.”

Yui obeyed Raoul's every command, thrilled to be pleasuring his master yet again. The Blondie ran his hands through his hair, a sigh escaping his lips as Yui took him in deeper. The sight of the beautiful youth servicing him was so erotic that Raoul began his ascent far earlier than he would have anticipated.

“Ah yes,” he moaned. “Perfect, Yui. Just...like that. Sweet...mother.” Gritting his teeth, the Blondie spent himself inside his warm mouth, delighting when Yui swallowed him without being told. “Yes. Yes,” he murmured urgently, holding the boy's head between his hands. His eyes rolled back and as the final spasms of pleasure transported him to another realm of being, a place where all of Amoi was swept away, and only he and Yui remained. As he drifted back into awareness, he stared down at the breathtaking

face of the green-eyed youth and reminded himself that they were both engaging in an extraordinarily dangerous activity. If Jupiter were to discover them, the consequences would be severe. Yui would most certainly be shipped to the border planets.

And as for Raoul...his mind would be tampered with, the very thing he had warned Iason about countless times. If anyone knew about this, it was Raoul, for part of his responsibilities had been to administer such neurological modifications at Jupiter's bidding. Such changes were permanent, completely transforming. His thoughts gravitated to Yousi, who had once been a Blondie of enormous stature and intelligence, but who now was severely limited cognitively after being modified for insubordination. He remembered now that Yousi had been altered for claiming that Jupiter could be brought down--an absurd claim, but one that Jupiter had not taken lightly, and had punished by taking everything away from the proud Blondie.

"Was that...satisfactory?" Yui asked nervously, puzzling over the serious look in his master's eyes. "Most definitely," came his master's reply. With a smile, Raoul pulled Yui up and then held him in his arms, eyes closed, for a long moment. "Yui," he said, finally. "We...must be very careful."

"Yes, Master."

"You must tell no one."

"I would not do such a foolish thing, Master."

"Because...do you understand what would happen if Jupiter were to discover us?"

"Yes." Yui was quiet for a moment. "But...Master Raoul, surely Jupiter knows that Sir Iason takes his pet, the mongrel Riki?"

Raoul froze. "What makes you think Iason takes his pet?"

Surprised, Yui shook his head. "Everyone knows that. It is...not news."

Sighing, Raoul closed his eyes, bringing a hand to his head and covering his eyes. "To be honest...I don't know, Yui. But Jupiter regards Iason differently than the rest of us. Perhaps she gives him

some license to bend her rules. But we can't expect the same leniency. Jupiter has no particular interest in me.”

For a long time, they remained thus, each reflecting on the situation they were in.

* * *

Riki waited in the billiard room, channeling all his frustration with Iason into his game. He was furious that the Blondie had tamed him in front of Juthian, all the more because he suspected it would leave bruises, and the last thing he needed now was more marks of punishment on his flesh. This was something he had been fretting about; Guy would demand to know why he had the marks of punishment, however fading. The only solution was to wait for a few days before taking him to bed; that was easily enough accomplished by playing a bit aloof and seducing him slowly. And then being sure that they paired in a DARK room. And...he was summoning up the courage to apply another treatment of accelerator, much as he despised it.

Although...perhaps he could simply pretend he was into rough sex.

“Shit,” he cursed, missing a shot as he suddenly remembered his branding. How would he explain that? Perhaps...if he covered it with a bandage, and feigned an injury of some kind?

“So you're considered the best at billiards in Midas?” Iason taunted, standing in the doorway.

“You can't judge me by that,” Riki retorted. “I was...distracted.”

“Then...how about a game?”

“You're on.” The mongrel set up the table, gifting Iason with an arched look that betrayed his confidence in his skill.

Iason smiled, chalking up his cue. “Shall I break?”

“Go ahead.” Riki watched him with glimmering eyes, certain that he would soundly defeat the beautiful Blondie.

With a look of equal certainty, Iason broke the nest with a sharp crack, sending three balls smartly into the pockets.

Riki raised an eyebrow in surprise, impressed. "Nice," he conceded.

Smiling, Iason proceeded to clear half the table before missing an especially difficult shot.

With a roguish grin, Riki moved into position, then with skillful ease nailed shot after shot. His mood improved progressively with each success, and gradually his anger faded away. Defeating Iason was exactly what the mongrel needed and filled him with confidence.

Iason was a little surprised at the mongrel's skill, and then a little irritated when it became evident he had just been beaten by his own pet. "I stand...defeated," he sighed, placing his cue on the table.

"And as the champion, I demand some compensation," Riki retorted.

"I see. And what is it you're claiming?" The Blondie stared back at him with a deliberately provocative gaze.

"I don't suppose I can claim the rest of my nights when I get back?" the mongrel asked, hopefully.

"No. If you want them, stay here with me." Iason made the offer in jest, although he secretly hoped Riki would abandon his plan to return to Ceres.

"Then," Riki replied, ignoring his offer, "I demand sexual favors now. Get undressed."

The mongrel stood, arms crossed on his chest, waiting.

Amused with his pet's authoritarian demeanor, Iason complied, removing his clothes with typical quiet grace.

Riki watched him, unzipping his trousers to release his quickly developing erection. "Bend over the table," he ordered.

"What, no kissing this time?" the Blondie teased. "You made such a fuss over its omission."

"Oh. Yeah. Come here first."

Iason obeyed, bending down to kiss him slowly, sliding his hand around Riki's back and pulling him close, his tongue exploring the mongrel in unrushed, sensual paths of pleasure.

“Uh,” Riki grunted, breaking away, his heart pounding. “Fuck, you're a good kisser.”

Iason slipped his warm hand around his pet's shaft, stroking him as he attempted to kiss him again.

“Whoa. Hold on. That's enough,” Riki said, fearing premature release. “Now, do as I say. Bend over that table.”

“As you wish, Master Riki.”

The Blondie proceeded to present himself, looking back with such a provocative expression that the mongrel shivered. All his anger with Iason had now completely evaporated, and now he was feeling good again, his excitement over the day returning full force. Suddenly he altered his agenda and decided to do something special for Iason in gratitude for his gift of one week's freedom.

He stepped forward and dropped to his knees.

Gasping, Iason closed his eyes as the mongrel spread him and began exploring him with his tongue. He had not expected it, especially since he knew Riki had been angry with him not an hour before. The sensation was heavenly and he drew his breath in sharply, shivering.

Riki savored Iason's response, finding his gasps especially erotic. When a long moan escaped the Blondie, however, he found that he could wait no longer. Rising up, he positioned himself behind him and guided himself into his master's remarkable depths, releasing an unconsciously held breath when Iason gripped him beautifully.

“Fuck yes,” he groaned, pulling out and sliding in again, this time deeper, pulling back on the Blondie's hips. He was especially enjoying Iason's position of submission, bent over the table for his pleasure. The Blondie was breathtakingly lovely, his soft hair spilling onto the billiard table, his back sculpted with just the right amount of firm muscles, his buttocks silky smooth and perfectly curved. Iason leaned on his elbows, gasping.

“Shit. I'm going to miss this,” Riki said, before he realized he'd vocalized his thoughts aloud.

“Are you?” Iason whispered, pleased.

“Most definitely. You're so fucking perfect...oh god...I love it when you squeeze me like that, shit.” Riki groaned, throwing his head back. “Iason, you're so....”

“Touch me,” Iason demanded, now anxious for release.

Riki pulled the Blondie's hips back a bit from the table and reached around to fondle him, now laying on Iason's back for easier access.

“Yes,” the Blondie encouraged. “That's it...keep--”

“I'm gonna come,” Riki warned, suddenly pumping Iason hard without meaning to, confused by his own excitement.

Iason responded positively to this maneuver. “Yes. Yes,” he breathed. “Oh...Riki.”

“Ohhh,” the mongrel moaned, sinking one last time into the Blondie's depths as all his pent-up lust was expelled, wave after wave of pleasure washing over him. The sound of his pet's arrival triggered Iason's release, and his moans mingled with Riki's as master and pet achieved coital bliss in concert.

“Holy fuck,” Riki gasped, collapsing completely onto the Blondie's back, eyes closed. A thought then occurred to him that had been nagging him for some time; he knew, deep in his heart, that sex with Guy had never been this good. He was not even sure why he wanted to see Guy again. He wanted a week of freedom, yes. But resuming his relationship with his old pairing partner...now he was not so sure that was even what he wanted.

“Don't go.”

“Huh?” Riki opened his eyes.

“Don't go away, Riki,” Iason whispered. “Stay with me.”

“But...you promised?”

“Yes. I am not saying you can't go. I am just...asking you to stay.”

For some moments Riki was quiet. He withdrew. “How can you ask me that?” he asked, finally, a little irritated. “You know...how much it means to me.”

Sighing, Iason stood up. “Then...promise me you will take a tracer with you that you can activate if you get into any trouble.”

“Sure,” Riki said, shrugging. “Now that we're talking about it...when can I go?”

“We can go now.”

“Seriously?” Riki brightened, excited. “Hey! Can I use my credits?”

“Yes. I also have some cash for you...in case you need it. But use your credits...I'll add more if you need them.” Iason also knew that, by using credits, he could track Riki's movements and purchases.

“And...how were you planning to get around?”

“Dunno. Trade my body for rides?”

Iason shot him a disapproving look as he dressed.

“I was just fucking kidding,” Riki muttered. “Oh! Can I get a bike?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of a vehicle. You can borrow any of mine.”

“I can't go back to Ceres driving something like that...it would be too...ostrichacious.”

“Do you mean...ostentatious?” Iason asked, smiling.

“Yeah. Whatever. Please...I haven't ridden in over two years!”

“That's what I'm worried about. Those bikes are quite dangerous.”

Riki snorted at this. “Maybe for you sissy Blondies. I practically grew up on a bike.”

“A stolen one, no doubt.”

“Can I help it if I was born in the slums? We had to do whatever it took to survive.”

“You'll wear a helmet.” This was stated, not asked.

“Of course.”

“Then, we'll get you the very best.”

“A Z-789 Skywalker?” Riki asked, eyes wide.

“If that's the best.”

“Fuck yeah it's the best!” Riki was so excited, he could hardly stand still. “Can I zip you?” he asked, impatient to be off.

Iason looked down at him, his voice lowering. "Riki. If you need...anything, or if you...want to come back, please call me." The look in the Blondie's eyes was so intense that the mongrel stilled for a moment.

"I will," he promised.

"Then, let's go."

Master and pet left Riki's suite and were about to leave the penthouse when Katze and Daryl arrived.

"Daryl!" Riki exclaimed.

"Riki." Daryl smiled.

"You look good."

"You've been gone quite awhile," Iason noted, giving Katze a pointed look.

"I'm sorry. It took forever before he was released," Katze lied, hoping Iason would not check up on this fact.

Iason nodded. "Daryl. Where are your release papers?"

Daryl dutifully handed them over, and the Blondie examined them. "So. You are to rest for the next week." He turned to Katze. "You'll be training Juthian, then. He arrived earlier today."

"Where is he?"

"In his room. I put him in the guest wing, next to Enyu. Katze. Call housekeeping for room 4."

"All right," Katze replied, puzzled.

"I'll be back in a few hours."

"I'll be back in about a week," Riki added, grinning.

Surprised, Daryl glanced at Iason, who offered no explanation.

"Take care, Riki," Katze said, softly.

"Katze." Riki winked at him as they left the penthouse.

* * *

Iason drove to the edge of the slums and put his vehicle in park. He turned to look at his pet, whose eyes were gleaming brightly.

"I'm here...I'm really...here," he breathed.

“Riki. Please. Be careful.” These words were whispered urgently.

“I know how to take care of myself,” Riki retorted, cocking his head back in a way that Iason hadn't seen in a long time.

“Yes. But...just in case.” Now Iason handed him a laser, a compact model that was easily concealed.

“Fucking awesome!” Riki exclaimed, turning it over in his hands.

“You have your cash...and your emergency tracer.” Iason refrained from mentioning the fact that the tracer was already activated. He knew Riki would be angry if he found out, but he couldn't bear the thought of not knowing where he was at all times.

“Yeah,” Riki nodded.

“Then...let's get your bike out of the back. But first,” now Iason leaned toward him, “give me a kiss.”

“Sure.”

“A real kiss, Riki.”

“Oh. Yeah. Okay.”

Riki scooted closer to him, and then, with unhurried deliberation, Iason and Riki kissed, a long, slow, tender kiss that spoke all that neither of them could say. It was simply the best kiss they had ever shared; it was so good, in fact, that Riki was momentarily tempted to abandon his agenda and just return to the penthouse with Iason.

But, just knowing he was so close to home...he couldn't pass up the opportunity for a week of freedom.

Breaking away, Iason looked down into his eyes, stroking his cheek thoughtfully. “Riki. Come back to me in one week before sundown.”

Riki nodded.

“Don't make me come looking for you,” Iason warned.

“I won't,” Riki promised.

“Very well.”

Iason flipped open his ring, pressed a button, and then slid a hand down his pet's pants, releasing the pet ring.

“Yes,” Riki moaned, thrilled to finally be relieved of its restriction.

Holding the ring between his two fingers, Iason looked directly at him. “One week, Riki. And then I expect no complaints when I put this back on you.”

With that, they got out of the vehicle and retrieved Riki's new bike from the trunk--a Z990 Skywalker, an upgrade from the model Riki had thought was the best. It was lightweight, fast, fairly quiet, and had both ground and hover capabilities, its design sleek and aerodynamic. It had cost well over 250,000 credits, and Riki was thrilled with it.

Riki put his helmet on and climbed on, starting the bike with a flick of his thumb. He turned to look at Iason, who stood watching him, his hair blowing around him in the wind, an inexplicable look etched onto his face.

“See ya,” Riki said, unceremoniously, and then sped off.

“Riki,” Iason breathed, watching his pet go, his heart breaking. He had a terrible feeling that he would never see his pet again, that something would happen, or that Riki would choose to stay away once he had a taste of freedom. “Please...come back to me,” he whispered, feeling as though he had lost part of his very self.

Chapter 41

Sir Riki

Iason got back into the vehicle, his mind reeling. He felt...ill, no doubt exacerbated by the previous day's drinking and near-disaster with the opiates. His hands trembled as he started up the generator, and for a long a moment, he just sat, hands on the steering wheel.

Riki was gone. He had not realized, until that very moment, how lonely he would be without his beloved pet. Suddenly one week seemed like a long time. And...he was worried. Inserting the tracer card into his vehicle monitor, he could see that Riki was moving through Midas...fast.

"Slow down, pet," he whispered, kicking himself for not putting some sort of speed restrictions on the Skywalker. He watched the blinking light move on the screen for some moments before he made any move to return home. Somehow, just sitting there on the edge of Ceres made him feel somewhat connected to Riki. He knew that, when he returned to Eos, he would feel completely cut off from him.

At least he could trace him. And he desperately hoped Riki would be liberal in his purchases so he could track him. Iason had tried to encourage just such a practice the previous night by pointing out how he would be able to treat his friends now that he had means.

"That's true," Riki had said, with a grin. "Wait till they see I smoke Dark Baccalias!"

Iason chuckled. "And what are you going to tell them, when they ask how you came into a credit portfolio?"

Riki was quiet for a moment. It was something he had been pondering himself. "I'll just say, that's my own business, fuck off."

Iason laughed, pulling the mongrel close.

Remembering the previous night and the hours they had talked and snuggled together made Iason especially dread being alone in his bed. For over two years it had been occupied by Riki's warm body, and he had become so accustomed to it that he hardly knew what he would do without him. Of course, he could always invite Enyu to his bed--no doubt the Xeronian would be quite eager to join him. But...it wouldn't be the same. It wasn't just a warm body he was going to miss. It was Riki.

Sighing, he drove back into Tanagura, glad to see that Riki had stopped moving. He punched in the identifier command and pulled up Depravities--a pool hall and pet brothel owned by Omaki Ghan. He immediately dialed up Omaki on full visual, who smiled.

"Iason. What a pleasure. In fact, I was going to call you to see what you thought of--"

"You own Depravities?" Iason interrupted.

"It might be a stretch to say I own depravities, though I certainly practice them."

"The pool hall," Iason snapped, impatient with Omaki's usual teasing.

"Ah, yes. As a matter of fact, I do. Yes. One of my many little, investments, shall we say. Don't tell me you're interested in--"

"Riki is there tonight. He may be there several nights this week. If anything happens to him while he's there, Omaki, I'll come and personally slit your chest open and pull out your lungs while you're still alive."

"No need to get me all aroused with sadistic threats," Omaki replied, with a little smile. "Consider it done. So, you've let the chick return to the roost, then?"

"This matter is to be kept quiet."

"You needn't worry about that. Surely you know by now I have no interest in Elite gossip."

"And be sure Riki doesn't know he's being watched."

“And...how am I to be compensated for these efforts?”

“Your compensation is remaining alive with all body parts intact.”

With a provocative smile, Omaki leaned closer to the screen. “Somehow I get the impression that you’re a little annoyed with me, Iason. Surely you didn’t take me seriously when I threatened to blackmail you?” Now Omaki turned to the side, leaning down, and Iason could hear a tiny voice make some incomprehensible request. “Not now, Aki. Be a good boy and run off and play,” Omaki said in a low voice.

“You really ought to put that boy back in the Nursery for a few years,” Iason commented.

Omaki laughed and paused before replying. “Oh no. I’m far too attached to him for that.”

“Don’t tell me you’re taking him, Omaki? Even you wouldn’t be that foolish, I hope?”

Omaki's expression shifted, a look of alarm pressing into his features. “Open frequency, Iason,” he whispered, a little urgently, through gritted teeth. “So, you’ll come back to the Towers soon and we’ll do lunch, then?”

Iason cut off the transmission. Jupiter immediately came on screen. Silently cursing himself, the Blondie then realized that she had monitored the entire conversation and that he had been foolish to use the communications grid. He should have visited Omaki personally.

“Why is your pet in Midas?” she demanded, her query reminding him that Jupiter would also have access to Riki's movements through his tracer logs.

“I’ve let him go visit his mongrel companions for a week,” he answered, smiling.

“That’s not standard pet protocol, Iason.”

“Technically, yes. But, he’s a mongrel, so normal pet administration rules don’t apply. I thought it would be good for him to stretch his wings a bit.”

“When are you planning to sell him?”

“I hadn’t really thought about it,” he replied, evasively.

“What do you think of the Xeronian?”

“Oh, he’s...quite obedient.”

“My suggestion is that you sell the mongrel to a Midas brothel and keep the Xeronian.”

“Concerning the Xeronian, I have to say, I was a little surprised with your gift.”

“He does not please you?”

“Oh...yes, of course, very much. Only,” now Iason paused, trying to think how to put it.

“You wonder why I sent you a sex-toy?” Jupiter finished for him.

“Yes,” Iason replied, relieved that he didn’t have to broach the subject.

“Because, I am aware of your proclivities, Iason, and I was hoping he might satisfy some of your more deviant desires so you could dispense with this mongrel. I am little surprised to see that you have opted to keep them both.”

Iason, feeling a little disconcerted that Jupiter was “aware of his proclivities,” had no reply, and for a moment struggled for something to say. He pulled into the parking lot to his complex, wondering how to play Jupiter now.

“Come see me tomorrow at noon,” she said. “I want to talk to you some more.”

“As you wish,” he replied, in a silky soft voice.

Jupiter cut off the transmission and Iason, furious, slammed his fist on the steering wheel. The last thing he wanted now was to have Jupiter prying into his private business. For some moments he just sat in his car, fuming. Finally, he got out and made his way up to the penthouse, already brooding about how to handle Jupiter at their next meeting.

Askel and Freyn greeting him at the entrance.

“You really should let at least one of us accompany you when you go out like that,” Askel chided him. “We can’t protect you if we’re not with you.”

“When I am going to the auctions, or to a public event, I’ll take bodyguards,” he replied, a little tersely. “Other than that please leave the matter up to my judgment.”

“As you wish, Sir Iason,” Askel murmured, bowing slightly, his face reddening slightly.

The door hummed open and Iason entered. Juthian was already standing there, as if expecting him, and Katze stood nearby, arms crossed on his chest, watching. Juthian glanced a little nervously at Katze and then stepped forward with a slight bow.

“Good afternoon, Master Iason. May I get you anything?”

“Yes, Juthian. Some wine, please.”

Satisfied, Katze nodded.

A little hesitantly, Juthian went to the bar and poured Iason a drink, glad that a wine bottle was already open. He was apprehensive about opening a bottle in front of his new master, especially as his hands were shaking. Iason had already moved inside to his favorite chair, and Juthian approached him anxiously.

“Your wine, Master Iason,” he said softly, eyes lowered.

Iason took the drink, smiling at the boy's trembling. “Am I so terrifying, Juthian?” he asked, smiling.

Unsure of how to reply, Juthian glanced back at Katze, who only stared back at him, wanting the boy to answer on his own.

“Yes, Master,” he murmured, finally. “A great Elite such as yourself.”

Iason chuckled softly. “You have nothing to fear from me, provided you remain obedient, Juthian.”

Now the boy braved a look at the beautiful Blondie, who smiled back in a comforting way.

“I imagine this must be difficult for you, going from a pampered existence to the life of a Furniture, and with a new master. How long were you with Xian?”

“Sixteen months,” he answered, quietly.

Iason nodded, a little surprised. Well beyond the usual one year that a pet was kept by an Elite. “Are you still in pain, Juthian, from your whipping and modification?”

“A little,” Juthian conceded.

“Then, I will let you retire early. You may return to your quarters.”

“Yes, Master.” Juthian bowed, and then backed away, looking at Katze for direction.

“Go to your room, like Master Iason says,” Katze said. “Tai will bring you your dinner. You may have one drink from the bar after 10. Be sure you are up before sunrise.”

Nodding, Juthian left the hall.

“He's going to work out well,” Katze said.

“Yes. He's very obedient,” Iason replied.

Katze regarded him for a moment. He had never seen Iason look so downcast before, except for the night that Raoul abducted Riki--and, of course, another night, years before. “So you really let him go back to Ceres?”

The Blondie nodded, sipping his wine.

Katze could tell he was worried. “Riki can take care of himself. He's tough, that one.”

Now Iason met his gaze, eyes intense and bright. “He has been in Eos for over two years. Even you must admit he's not the same as he was when I first brought him here.”

“True, but if it's a question of Riki versus some other mongrel, I'd still put my money on Riki.”

A little comforted by this, Iason sighed. “He's at Depravities.”

Katze smiled a little at the mention of the well-known pool hall and brothel in the E-Zone district of redlight Midas. “He's probably looking for his old gang. Bison practically lives there.” Pausing for a moment, Katze added, in a low voice, “I seriously doubt he's with another pet. I heard him once say that he didn't need to pay for sex and that brothel pets carried diseases.”

Iason chuckled. “And is that supposed to comfort me, that he is capable of soliciting sex for free?”

A little embarrassed, Katze smiled. “I see your point,” he conceded. “Still...Iason, you must have expected, by sending Riki back to Midas, that he would be--”

The Blondie shot him a look so full of sadness and jealousy that Katze abruptly fell silent. "Then...if you have no further need of me," he said, after a pause, "I'll retire to my room."

Iason nodded dismissively, bringing a hand to his forehead. Another headache was coming on. He sighed as Katze left the hall, feeling almost a little envious of him knowing he had Daryl waiting for him in his bed.

"Master," Enyu said softly.

"What is it, Enyu?" Iason sighed, closing his eyes.

"Forgive me, Master, but...might I take a bath?"

Now Iason regarded the Xeronian, realizing with no small amount of chagrin that the poor pet had not bathed in several days while engaging in activities that begged for it. He rose and immediately went to him, unlocking his chain from the floor post.

"You will have to overlook my poor treatment of you, Enyu. This has been an awkward week and you were quite...unexpected. In the future I will be sure that your needs are better met."

Excited, Enyu jumped up. "Thank you, Master Iason," he said, now completely aroused to be standing so close to the beautiful Blondie. It was all he could do to keep from pouncing on him.

Iason led the pet to the baths, and, after chaining him firmly to the floor post of the pet bath, started filling the bath, pouring some aromatic salts into the warm water. Enyu was beside himself with excitement, desperate to clean himself and anxious to set foot inside the most luxurious bath he had ever seen. It was large enough to accommodate three or four people, let alone one. He watched it fill up impatiently; even with multiple spouts, the bath seemed to take forever to fill.

"Go ahead," Iason said, finally, smiling a little as Enyu slid into the water with a moan. The Xeronian immediately went underwater, coming up and shaking the water from his hair like an animal.

Enyu's performance had a predictable effect on the watching Blondie, who was, after all, a hardcore voyeur. His heart began pounding a little faster and, when the Xeronian gazed up at him with a deliberately provocative, inviting stare, he felt the blood

surge to his loins. As Enyu stood up and began soaping up his body, Iason made a decision.

He began undressing, much to Enyu's utter delight. He eyed the Blondie's beautiful physique with lust, starting to tremble. "Master," he warned, "I cannot stay away from you, if you come into the bath like that."

"You do not need to stay away," Iason replied, in Xeronian.

"Do you want something special?" Enyu asked, excited.

"Yes," Iason said, stepping down into the bath and then submerging his body momentarily to get wet. Then he stood up, legs apart, hands on his hips, water dripping from his body. His arousal was readily apparent. "Pleasure me with your mouth."

Not needing a second invitation, Enyu knelt in the water before his master and, looking up at him with dilating eyes, slowly slipped his hand around his shaft and pressed his tongue on the tip of his organ, flicking it suggestively.

Breathing deeply, Iason looked down at him, smiling. "Yes, little pet," he encouraged.

With slow circles, Enyu continued to tease him a little by moving his tongue around the head of his shaft.

Iason, suddenly impatient for more intense stimulation, grabbed Enyu's hair with one hand and with the other pressed himself against Enyu's lips. "Open," he commanded.

With a naughty smile, Enyu refused to obey, pressing his lips tight together.

Finding this deliberate disobedience exciting, Iason pulled his head back by the hair and forced himself into the Xeronian's mouth. "You want me to discipline you, is that it?" he whispered, enjoying Enyu's mock resistance.

Enyu, suddenly not sure if his master was teasing, opened his mouth fully then and sucked so beautifully on the Blondie that Iason feared he might ejaculate on the spot. Enyu slid his hands up his legs to his abdomen, and Iason reached down and stroked his forearms, breathing harder. When the Xeronian began taking him

deep into his throat and squeezing him with his throat muscles, he pulled out, shaking.

“Stand up,” he ordered.

Enyu obeyed, and Iason immediately picked him up and laid him down on the edge of the bath, pushing his legs up towards his chest and pinning his wrists to the tile.

“I'm going to be hard on you, pet,” he warned. The pet's portal wide and exposed, he then proceeded to enter, watching Enyu's face intensely as he reacted to the pain of penetration. The Xeronian cried out, but at the same time looked at his master with such a look of obvious solicitation that Iason found he could not hold back and immediately began nothing short of a barbaric acquisition. He took his pet hard, easily honoring Riki's mandate that the Xeronian be made to whimper. Iason was beside himself with lust; he was so aroused and pleased by the fuck that he began grunting in a manner atypical for his usual more elegant ascent.

“You feel like heaven, little pet,” he hissed. “You're so tight I could hardly fit.”

Enyu, who was now finding some relief from his initial discomfort as he loosened up for his master, began deliberately provoking him. “Fuck me harder, Master,” he replied, elliptical pupils dilating and constricting in an intoxicating manner.

Needing no additional prompting, Iason abruptly pulled out, flipping Enyu onto his stomach and lifting his hips up to slide the pet onto his engorged shaft. Once thus positioned, he widened his stance and, pulling back a little violently on Enyu's hips, began fucking the Xeronian as hard and deep as he could, a project which quickly propelled him past his critical point.

With a loud groan, the Blondie released his hot essence into his pet's willing embrace, shuddering as spasms of pleasure coursed through his body. Enyu was panting, painfully aroused, thrilled with being taken so enthusiastically by his master and desperate for release. He attempted to fondle himself but Iason grabbed hold of his wrist and flipped him over onto his back, pushing his legs apart

for complete access, and then began stroking him with masterful technique.

Uttering a strange, spine-tingling sound that was something between a squeal and a moan, the Xeronian wiggled toward Iason, thrusting into his hand. Iason, still breathing hard from his efforts, watched his pet with fascination. Enyu whimpered--now from pleasure--in such a pathetic manner that the Blondie leaned down and prepared to relieve his pet.

Enyu, raising his head in surprise, began panting loudly, staring at Iason with wide eyes.

"Master," he whispered, almost pleaded, reaching out to grab onto his arms. "I'm about to...."

The moment the Blondie touched his tongue to the pet's rigid erection, Enyu ejaculated, semen shooting up onto Iason's lips and face. Enyu arched his back, his head thrown back, crying out with such beauty that Iason shuddered.

The Blondie reached down and splashed some water on his face, cleaning off a surprisingly copious amount of semen.

"I...I am sorry," Enyu apologized. "I could not help it."

"No need for apologies." Iason smiled, suddenly reminded of his first encounter with Riki. Just thinking of Riki, though, put a damper on his spirits, and he stepped out of the bath and prepared to retire to his quarters, before remembering that there was no one to tend to Enyu. He paused, standing naked for a moment.

"Master, you have an extraordinary body," Enyu purred, lying comfortably in the bath and eyeing him with admiration.

Iason smiled, but made no reply. He enjoyed his pet's flattery and wished that Riki was a bit more generous in his compliments. But then, he conceded, he was rather accustomed to the mongrel's tough, insulting demeanor.

Sighing, he stepped back into the bath to wait for Enyu to finish. Thrilled that the beautiful Blondie had joined him again, Enyu smiled, humming a haunting little tune as he washed his hair. Iason leaned his head back against the side of the bath and closed his eyes, wondering where Riki was, and what he was doing.

* * *

He couldn't believe it. He was really back...and he was free. Just being relieved of the pet ring restriction filled him with excitement and a powerful longing to pull over somewhere and masturbate, just because he could. But he was also anxious to find his gang, and so he sped through the slums toward Midas E-Zone, confident that he would find Guy and the others at their favorite club, Depravities.

As soon as he pulled up to the club, he knew he was right. He recognized Guy's bike instantly by the skull and crossbones painted on the side. Bringing his bike to a stop, he smiled at the attention he was generating. No one there had ever seen a Skywalker before, and he knew it. With pride, he eased off the bike, and with the press of a tiny remote control, activated the shock guard. Immediately a red laser encircled the bike, its low hum warning any would-be thieves that the bike was protected by a high voltage shield.

Everyone watched to see who the mysterious biker was, and when Riki pulled off his helmet, an excited murmur spread through the small crowd of onlookers. He entered the club, and stood just inside for a moment, perusing the scene.

It was noisy, as always, a familiar jumble of rough conversation, laughter, music, and the crack of billiard balls. A live band played a dirty funk in the corner of the hall while two pets engaged in sexual congress on an elevated platform. Riki drew less attention inside, where most everyone was occupied with some pursuit or another. He scanned the hall until he saw a familiar face--it was Noris. And next to him, with his arm around the same youth Riki had seen him with before, was Guy. He was laughing, leaning forward and saying something to the others that appeared to generate considerable mirth.

His heart pounding, he slowly walked toward the table, helmet under one arm. Noris saw him before Guy did, and was so surprised that his cigarette fell from him mouth.

“Fuck!” he yelled, brushing his leg where the burning embers had fallen.

Guy was so amused by this that he began laughing hard, a familiar, contagious sound that Riki remembered well. With a little smile, he approached the table just as Guy finally realized what Noris was so worked up about.

The look on his face was priceless. Stunned, he simply sat there for a moment while Riki stood, staring down at him.

“Riki,” he finally whispered.

His partner appraised Riki with obvious disdain, jealousy flashing darkly in his eyes.

“It's been a long time,” Riki said, softly.

“Fucking...where the hell have you been?” Now Guy leapt up, not even waiting for Noris and Sid to move out of the way but walking across the table and jumping down in front of Riki.

“It's really you,” he breathed.

“Yeah.”

They stared at each other for a long moment, their eyes conveying a thousand emotions that their rather terse conversation failed to capture.

Suddenly Guy stepped forward and hugged him tight. “I've been worried sick about you,” he whispered, then added, a little angrily, “where the fuck have you been? Why didn't you call me or something?”

Riki did not answer, his gaze gravitating to Guy's new partner, who now regarded him with unveiled jealousy and mounting anger. He broke the embrace first, then whispered in Guy's ear, “Your boyfriend is getting a little upset.”

“He's not,” Guy began, then lowering his voice to the softest whisper, continued, “not officially my boyfriend.”

“Well, your unofficial boyfriend looks about ready to implode.”

Now Guy turned around, trying to pacify his partner with a reassuring smile. “This is Riki,” he said. “Riki, this is Takeipo.”

“Everyone calls me Kei,” he replied, nodding slightly to acknowledge the introduction.

Riki nodded, feeling a little awkward. He hadn't really thought about having to deal with a rival for Guy's affections, and this Kei seemed rather unfriendly. He was also annoyingly attractive--his hair was just past his shoulders, dark and tousled, and his features were intense and serious, his dark eyes piercing, his mouth curled in a half-smile of contempt.

"Join us," Guy said, sliding in past Sid and Noris to his place, and holding an inviting hand out to Riki.

Glancing at Kei, Riki slid in next to Luke, across from Guy, eliciting a look of disappointment from Guy and victory from his partner.

"So what have you been up to?" Noris asked. "We've been hearing all kinds of...bizarre rumors."

The others laughed at this, and Riki tried to cover his discomfort with a smile. Had they heard he was the pet of Iason Mink? Or was there some other rumor floating around?

Riki shrugged, pulling out his smokes, and, after taking one, offered them to the others.

"Holy shit," Sid said. "Dark Baccalias!"

"Holy smokes is more like it," Guy said, grinning. "So when did you start smoking like an Elite?"

"A while back," Riki said.

Riki held out the pack to Kei, who shook his head as though unimpressed.

At that moment an attendant came to their table, which surprised everyone, because typically they had to practically assault an attendant to get service.

"Can I bring you anything?" he asked, looking directly at Riki.

"Stout. A round, for everyone," he replied, motioning to the others.

"Certainly," he replied, looking a little nervous. "How will you pay?"

"Credit."

The attendant held out the hand encryption board and Riki pressed his hand onto it, much to the complete surprise of his gang.

The attendant read his signature and the accompanying text with surprise, a look of fear pressing into his features. The signature read:

Pet: Z107M

Class: Unclassified

Owner: Iason Mink

Credit line: Open ended; 750,000 credits available immediately.

ALERT: Identity is to be kept CONFIDENTIAL. Merchants who comply will be generously financially compensated. Those who disobey this mandate will be dealt with severely and personally by Iason Mink.

He looked at Riki for a moment, eyes wide. "Very good, Sir. I will be back with your order right away," he said, and with a slight bow, backed away.

"Very good Sir," Noris immediately repeated in a mocking tone. "Like, since when did you become a prince?"

Riki smiled as the others laughed.

"Yeah, how did you get a credit portfolio?" Luke demanded.

"I have...my ways."

"Fine. Holding out on us, are you?" Sid accused.

Riki lit up, taking a long drag. The others did the same.

"Smooth," Guy breathed. "Now you've ruined regular smokes for me."

"How much does a pack of these cost, anyway?" Noris asked.

Riki shrugged. "1000 credits or so."

"A thousand! And you can afford to smoke these regularly?"

"Riki," Guy said, a little urgently. "Where have you been?"

"Yeah, did you leave Amoi?" Sid asked.

"No, Riki answered, avoiding the first question.

Everyone waited, but he remained quiet.

"Oh, so you're being all mysterious about it then," Guy said.

The attendant returned with the drinks, again surprising everyone with his fast service. They were accustomed to being treated rather rudely, and they all knew that the difference in their service had to be due to Riki's presence.

"I'll pay for my own," Kei announced, tossing a few bills into the table.

"Whatever," Riki said, shrugging, but just let the money sit there.

The others seemed delighted with their free round of drinks, and made a toast to Riki's return.

"To Sir Riki!" Sid said, grinning.

"Sir Riki!" came the laughing rejoinder, as everyone--except Kei--drank to Riki the Dark.

"You're not gonna run off again now, are you?" Noris asked.

Riki made no answer, taking another long drag.

"Riki? You're back, right?" Guy asked, a little anxiously.

"For awhile," he replied, evasively.

"How long is awhile?"

Smiling, Riki shrugged again. Luke punched him in the arm. "You haven't changed, ya wise ass."

"Why are you being so mysterious?" Guy demanded. "Why don't you tell us where you've been and what the fuck is going on?"

"That's my own business," he replied, quietly.

"Oh, it's your business?" Now Guy looked a little angry. "How do you think I felt when you just fucking disappeared, Riki? I had no idea where you were or if you were ever coming back again. Have you any idea what I went through?"

Kei slid a hand possessively down Guy's thigh, trying to elicit his attention.

Everyone else at the table squirmed a little uncomfortably, feeling that a scene was about to erupt that was best played out between the two old lovers somewhere else.

Riki's eyes were averted. He raised them, looking directly at Guy. "I am sorry, Guy," he said, softly. "Perhaps...we can discuss this somewhere in private?"

"Yeah," Guy replied, softening a bit. "Yeah, we can do that. Where...are you staying?"

"I'll get a hotel somewhere."

The others laughed.

"A hotel, is it?" Noris repeated, grinning. "You've really come into a fortune, haven't you, Sir Riki?"

"Then...I can help you settle in."

"Sure."

"Are you coming over tonight?" Kei demanded, looking a little irritated with the "date" that had just been made while he was sitting there.

"Don't know," Guy answered, glancing over at Riki.

Kei turned and shot Riki a withering look, then turned back to Guy. "Well, I'm outta here. I've got a package to deliver. Give me a kiss."

Guy bent his face up dutifully, but Kei had in mind something a little more intimate than a peck. He prodded Guy's mouth open with his tongue, kissing him long, slow, and hard, while he slid his hand up his thigh, resting just below his genitals. Resisting initially out of embarrassment, Guy soon began to respond, enjoying his lover's kiss.

Kei broke away, gazing over at Riki with a look of triumph mixed with a warning. The mongrel stared back defiantly, refusing to be intimidated by him. He stood up and squeezed his way out, his body brushing against Riki as he left the booth. With a little smirk, he left.

"See ya," Noris said, and the others nodded.

Now Guy looked at Riki with unrestrained longing. "Let's go," he whispered.

"All right." Riki stood up.

"We'll see you around tomorrow then?" Sid asked.

"Yeah."

Now Guy joined him, wanting to put his arm around him but feeling a little reluctant. They went outside to get their bikes.

Guy stopped in his tracks when he saw Riki's bike. "Whoa. A Skywalker?" he exclaimed in disbelief. "Is it stolen?" he asked, lowering his voice.

"It's mine."

Now Guy shook his head. "You're going to tell me what the fuck's going on, Riki," he said, shaking his finger at him. "I'm going to make you, tonight."

Riki grinned at his threat, putting his helmet on and lowering the shock guard shield. He started the engine and waited for Guy to join him, and then they sped off into the streets of Midas.

* * *

Enyu watched Iason with mounting excitement. His master had fallen asleep in the bath, and the Blondie looked so beautiful and enticing that he knew he would not be able to resist. Slowly, he moved through the water and then straddled him, kissing his neck.

Opening his eyes with a start, Iason grabbed hold of Enyu and pulled him off his neck, holding him for a moment as he drifted back into awareness. "Naughty pet," he whispered, his voice raspy with sleep.

"Punish me," Enyu replied, his eyes dilating.

Smiling, Iason began stroking himself, finding that he was already aroused. Just being near the Xeronian when he was in heat was enough to give him an erection. "You want me to punish you, little pet?"

"Yes, Master."

"And how shall I accomplish that? Shall I take you...like this?" With that, Iason took hold of Enyu's hips and forced him down onto his engorged cock, eliciting a series of whimpers and sharp cries from his pet. "There. Now I have punished you."

Gasping and grimacing, Enyu could not even reply as he struggled to adjust to his master's enormous girth. Iason kept tight

hold of his hips and forced him to move up and down on him. The Xeronian cried out in pain, and then, slowly, as he opened up a little, his vocalizations betrayed his growing pleasure.

“Yes, Master,” he answered, finally. “Punish me more, like this. Punish me hard!”

“I'll punish you hard,” Iason said in a low voice, now lifting and lowering Enyu violently, biting his lip. “Ohhh....little pet...you make me come so easily.”

“I love it when Master comes. Come for me, Master,” he urged, leaning down to bite his throat.

This action proved fatal; ascending quickly, Iason ejaculated so hard he groaned loudly, his rapture heard throughout the penthouse.

Excited, Enyu began pumping himself, ready for release.

Iason opened his eyes and watched him for a moment. “Would you...like to try again?” he asked, the look in his eyes leaving no question as to what he referred to.

“Yes, Master!” Enyu cried.

“Stand up.”

The Xeronian did so, offering himself to the lovely Blondie, who, reached out and pulled him closer, and then, sliding a hand around his shaft, slowly began pleasuring him with his tongue.

“Ohhh,” Enyu breathed, panting. “So good, Master!”

Iason answered this by taking him completely into his mouth, eliciting a strangely erotic squawk from the watching pet. Unable to resist, Enyu reached down and let his hands rest on the Blondie's head, arching back a little as he thrust into Iason's mouth. “So hot...so wet...I'm coming soon,” he warned.

The Blondie opened his eyes and gazed up at him so provocatively that Enyu released without meaning to, gasping as he threw his head back. He groaned, his semen shooting into the waiting mouth of his Master, who drank him, shivering a little from the sound of Enyu's ecstasy.

Coming back into awareness, Enyu stared down at Iason, eyes wide. “You...swallowed me,” he whispered, astounded.

“Is that so surprising?” Iason asked, smiling.

“I did not think...I did not expect,” Enyu stammered, then fell silent.

“Did you enjoy that, Enyu?”

“Oh,” the Xeronian moaned, biting his lip. “More than anything, Master. You are...so good to me.”

“I fear I have taken rather poor care of you, in fact,” he replied. “There really is no excuse.”

“I have not been ill-treated,” Enyu protested. “Although...I could...use some clothes, Master.”

“Of course.” Iason thought for a moment, and then considered the Xeronian, who was still standing before him. “I know just the thing,” he said. Enyu was just about the same size as...Anori had been. And he was sure his clothes were all still there. They were mostly formal silk robes--perfect for Enyu.

Only...he wasn't in a hurry to enter the room. He decided to get Katze to retrieve them, and so rose from the bath, finding a large towel to wrap around his waist.

“I'll be back soon,” he said. “Is the water warm enough?”

“Oh yes,” Enyu replied, sinking down into the tub again, and smiling at his Master.

Iason walked down the hall, making for Daryl's room. He started to knock on the door and then hesitated, suddenly listening to the activity within.

“What are you doing?” Daryl cried.

“Hush,” Katze replied, smiling. “Just let it happen. We've done this before.”

“Not with these things on!”

“I know. That makes it even better, right?”

Katze had pulled Daryl's hips up, spreading his legs to get at his portal with his tongue, and Daryl, overwhelmed by the sensations of the G-wave belt, was having trouble relaxing.

“Oh! Katze! It's...stop...it's...too much.”

“Come on, love. Keep your head down on the bed.”

“Ohhh!” Daryl cried.

Iason listened outside the door for a moment, smiling. Somehow Katze had found a way to overcome their rather significant obstacles to sex. And Daryl's resistance reminded him...specifically of a time when he had pleased Riki on his lap, and his pet had been overwhelmed by his technique. He decided to leave them to their sexual pursuits.

Backing away, he made his way down the hall to Anori's suite. As he approached the room, his heart began beating a little faster. He had not been inside the room since...well, since that night. With trembling fingers, he overrode the lock code and the door hummed open, the lights automatically flickering on.

For a moment he just stood there, staring inside, as though he expected to see something. But of course, there was nothing there. It looked simply like another suite, nothing extraordinary whatsoever.

Stepping into the room, Iason was bombarded with memories and images. He remembered how he had waited for Anori to return, every minute that passed filling him with stronger resolve. He had been so furious...and extraordinarily jealous. When Anori finally entered the suite, he startled at seeing Iason sitting calmly in one of his chairs.

"Iason," he murmured, his eyes widening.

For a long moment they stared at one another, Iason's icy cold gaze conveying his knowledge of Raoul's illicit union with Anori.

"It didn't have anything to do with you," Anori said, finally. "It was just...lust."

Now Iason leapt to his feet. "And this is just...revenge." With that, he plunged a laser-knife into Anori's stomach, twisted the blade and then withdrawing it, and then plunging it again into the Ambassador's heart.

Blood dribbled from Anori's mouth as he stared back at Iason, surprised. Then, his eyes glassing over, he began to fade. Iason pulled out the knife and Anori fell to his knees, frozen for a moment before he toppled over.

Now Iason stared down at him, breathing hard. Then, the full horror of what he'd done hit him, and he fell back into a chair, dropping the knife. Dark blood pooled around Anori in a slowly widening arc. For a long time, the Blondie simply sat there, unable to move.

"Anori," Raoul called from outside. "Open up already." Then, after a moment, Raoul spoke again. "What kind of game is this? I'm going to have to punish you if you don't open this door RIGHT NOW!"

Iason listened to his teasing, feeling an overwhelming sense of sadness and loss. In that instant, he knew that he could not love Raoul anymore, that what they had shared together had been irretrievably spoiled by Raoul's indiscretion. He wondered if there had been others, or if Anori was the first.

"All right. That's it. You're making me use my secret weapon." Raoul fiddled with the code-box, forcing the door open through a technique he'd learned at the Academy. The door hummed open and Raoul dashed in. "You're in for it now! I warned--"

Now Raoul fell dead silent when he saw Iason, his eyes immediately shifting to the floor, where Anori lay. Blood was everywhere. Speechless, he grabbed onto the bar counter behind him.

"Nice to see you again," Iason said, wryly.

Raoul shook his head. "Iason...my god...what have you done?"

"I have taken my blood vengeance, Raoul. We both know why."

Bringing a hand to his face, Raoul held his forehead for a long moment before replying. "It wasn't... oh Iason. It didn't mean...anything."

"From whose perspective?"

"This...this is going to be a problem. He's not just anyone, Iason. He's an Ambassador."

Iason sighed, closing his eyes. "I know."

"This is my fault. I'll say...I'll say I killed him."

"No. I take full responsibility."

"You...you have to ask Jupiter for help. She's partial to you, Iason. Everyone says so."

The Blondie nodded, at the moment not really caring what happened to him. He felt devastated by Raoul's betrayal.

Now Raoul approached him, crouching down. "Please...can you forgive me, Iason?"

"Don't know," he replied, honestly.

"How could I have been so stupid?" Raoul lamented. "When I love you...so much."

Iason sighed. He knew Raoul's sex drive was mostly to blame, but he found it hard to understand how Raoul could claim to love him after what he'd witnessed only moments before in the observatory.

"Do you...hate me?" Raoul asked, his green eyes wide with fear.

"Not much," Iason answered, with a little smile.

Remembering that night now, nearly fifteen years later, Iason felt strangely detached, as though it had happened to someone else. He went to the closet and opened it, breaking the airtight seal. Anori's clothes still hung just as they had all those years before, in perfect condition. Iason reached out and selected one--a dark green silk robe with heavily embroidered sleeves. It was perfect for Enyu; he selected it and then sealed the closet again.

When he returned to the baths, Enyu looked up in surprise, eyeing the robe in disbelief. "That's for me?" he asked.

"Yes. And there are others. We'll go to the tailor as soon as you're finished with your interval."

His eyes gleaming with wonder, Enyu got out of the bath, examining his new garment with obvious delight. "It's so beautiful."

"Put it on."

Enyu dried himself off and obeyed his Master's command, belting the robe with a long winding sash.

Iason nodded his approval. Enyu looked stunning in it, no question.

Relieved to be wearing some clothes, the Xeronian stood tall, feeling rather proud of his new attire. Iason led him back to the hall, chaining him up again, and then retired to Riki's room for the night.

* * *

"I can't fucking believe you can afford this room," Guy said, grinning, as they entered the penthouse suite of the Denovian Royal hotel.

Riki smiled, enjoying being able to impress him.

"Look at this place! Holy shit!" Guy stood, gazing in disbelief. "And it has a full bar, and...hey! That's a holographic projector! We can watch pet porn!"

"Can I get you a drink?"

"Hell yes. What do you think they have?"

"Probably most everything." Riki went to the bar, picking out some brandy for himself.

"Brandy...that looks good...I'll have some of that, too."

Smiling, Riki poured him a glass and handed it to him. Guy took a sip, his eyes lighting up. "Whoa. This is really good shit."

Riki took a drink and nodded. "Yeah."

For a moment they were both silent.

"Riki," Guy said finally, his voice lowering, "god. I've missed you...so much. And I've been so worried about you."

Nodding, Riki took out his smokes, lighting one up. "Want one?" he offered.

Guy took the proffered smoke but just turned it around in his fingers for a moment.

"I waited for you...for an entire year, you know. Ask anyone. I finally gave up--I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

"Kei seems like a nice guy."

"Oh...he's," now Guy shook his head. "He doesn't mean anything to me, Riki. In my heart...there could only ever be you." Guy looked at him with such intensity that Riki felt a little uncomfortable.

"You seem to mean something to him," Riki observed.

"Hmmm."

"That's what it seemed like to me, anyway."

"Well, he's the jealous type."

Riki laughed at this. "Who isn't?"

"I just mean--"

"You're fucking him, though, right?"

Guy studied him for a moment, smiling. "So. You do still care."

Falling silent, Riki took a deep drag. Guy put his smoke to lips and waited for a light. Riki leaned forward, lighting him up, and they stared deep into one another's eyes.

"Don't tell me...after all this time, you haven't had your hand in the cookie jar?" Guy pressed.

Riki shrugged, feeling disinclined to discuss the matter.

"Is there someone or not?" he demanded.

"Yeah. There's someone." Riki almost choked on the words.

Looking a little disappointed, Guy smiled to cover his angst.

"So. Who is he?"

"Just...someone."

"And...where is this just someone right now?"

"At home, in Eos," Riki answered, without thinking.

"Eos?" Narrowing his eyes, Guy stared at him for a moment.

"Would that be your home as well, Riki?"

Riki made no reply.

"What, is he some Elite bodyguard or something?"

"Not exactly."

"Why are you being so secretive? What's going on, Riki? Where have you been?"

Now Riki stared back at him, fear pressing into his eyes. "Stop asking me," he pleaded.

"No. I won't stop asking. I want to know where the fuck you've been and why you haven't called me in over two years!" Angry, Guy slammed his drink onto the bar counter.

"It's none of your fucking business!" Riki yelled back.

“Dammit, Riki! You just fucking left with no explanation, and now you come back and expect me to just eat up all your bullshit!”

“I don't expect anything from you,” he answered, softly, moving away.

Guy grabbed him from behind, holding him close. “Don't walk away from me,” he whispered. “Don't you know...don't you get it? Fuck, Riki! I loved you...I still do.”

His heart pounding, Riki became aware of Guy's body pressing against him; he could feel his old lover's arousal, and suddenly he realized that he was not ready to pair with Guy...not yet.

Breaking Guy's embrace, he tried to move away, but Guy grabbed him and threw him up against the wall.

“What game is this?” he demanded, pressing his body close. “You know you want me, Riki.” As if to prove his point, Guy slid a hand between his legs up to his genitals, where he caressed a quickly hardening bulge. He leaned down and kissed Riki, forcing his mouth open with his tongue, and then exploring him, hungrily, moaning.

“I want you so badly,” he pleaded, kissing Riki's neck. “I've missed this...god I've missed this.”

Gasping, Riki began to panic. He wasn't ready. Maybe his body was, but his mind wasn't. And neither was his heart. In that moment he realized how much he had changed from the days when he would fuck practically anything that moved.

“Not...tonight,” he whispered. “Not yet, Guy. Let's take it...a little slower.”

His brow wrinkling with confusion, Guy considered him for a moment, then released him. “All right,” he agreed, adjusting himself with a pained look on his face. “But when you're ready I'm fucking taking you hard.”

Riki made no reply to this, but simply moved away, relieved.

* * *

Deciding to check Riki's whereabouts before he retired, Iason opened the tracer program and saw that he was at the Denovian Royal hotel. A purchase log confirmed it--a suite for two. This last detail made his heart sink a little. He had expected it, but to be confronted with the cold reality of his pet with someone else was almost more than he could bear.

Brooding over the image of Riki with his old lover, Iason found it impossible to sleep. He tossed and turned restlessly in Riki's bed, and finally got up, pacing through the penthouse.

He went out to the gardens, sitting down on the stone bench and staring up at the sky. His eyes instinctively gravitated to Icaria, and he smiled, remembering how his pet had wanted to find it.

At that very moment, Riki was standing on the balcony of his suite, similarly unable to sleep. He was looking up at the same constellation, thinking of Iason, unable to enjoy his first night of freedom, because he missed him terribly. Guy had left earlier when Riki had failed to invite him to spend the night. Now Riki stood, staring up the stars, and with slow strokes brought himself to orgasm, savoring his freedom from the pet ring.

Yet, the irony was that when able to masturbate freely, Riki's thoughts drifted to Iason, his fantasies all inextricably wrapped around the Blondie who had made him his pet.

"Iason," he whispered, and then, his muscles suddenly contracting, he cried out his release, his voice rising above the calm of the night.

Deviance and Depravities

The door hummed close, and Xian stood for a moment, simply staring at the Xeronian who looked up at him so provocatively, waiting for his command. His heart was beating so hard he could hear it in his ears.

“Enyu, isn't it?” he asked, finally, removing his gloves.

“Yes...should I call you, Sir Xian?”

“Call me Master,” Xian replied, his eyes gleaming. “Lie back on that bed and spread your legs. I want to watch you stimulate yourself.”

“Yes, Master,” Enyu purred, climbing onto the bed and settling down comfortably, giving Xian just the view he had asked for as he began stroking himself with experienced fingers.

“That's it,” Xian whispered, watching him quietly for a moment. “Yes. Just like that. Now, keep doing that...and insert a finger. Thrust it.”

Enyu obeyed, straining a bit to accomplish the position. “Nnnn,” he groaned.

So far, this was no different than instructing any of his pets. But now, as Xian prepared to cross into new territory, he found that he was trembling. He began to undress, smiling when Enyu reacted to this with obvious pleasure.

The Blondie was physically stunning--his muscles flexed with every movement, betraying his strength; his chest, in particular, was broad and well-cut. Xian wore a long braid in his hair, capped with a beaded tassel, reminding Enyu again of an ancient Xeronian

warrior. He was truly a man, in every sense of the word. "Please fuck me, Master," he pleaded.

"Oh...I will," Xian replied, his voice quivering a little from his excitement. "But first...I'll have you pleasure me with your mouth."

"Should I stop what I'm doing?"

"Yes. Sit on the edge of the bed."

As Enyu did so, Xian approached him, now fully naked, his immense erection throbbing and twitching in his hand. The Xeronian's eagerness to please excited him beyond measure. Holding himself up to the youth's lips, he slipped one hand behind Enyu's head and pulled him forward, "Pleasure me," he whispered.

And Enyu did so, with such enthusiasm and skill that Xian nearly ejaculated on the spot. He was unaccustomed to the stimulation and groaned loudly, right from the start. Pleased, Enyu gave his best performance, sliding his tongue seductively across the head, licking under the rim, and then sucking him, gently.

Xian closed his eyes, throwing his head back, imagining that it was Ju who pleased him so perfectly. His vocalizations were loud and incessant; the Blondie simply could not believe how good it felt. Realizing that he was ascending too fast, he abruptly withdrew, trying to regain his composure.

"Turn around," he said, finally. "Get...on your knees."

"Like this?" Enyu piped, happily obeying, and offering himself enticingly by laying his head down on the bed.

"Exactly so," Xian answered, licking his lips, his mouth suddenly gone dry. He could not believe what he was about to do. A part of him was anxious about violating one of Jupiter's laws, but another part--a very prominent part--felt excited just knowing he was doing that which was forbidden.

The Blondie stood at the edge of the bed, and, after licking his finger, inserted it into the pet's portal, testing it. The Xeronian gripped him tightly and Xian shuddered, for a moment wondering if he would truly fit inside him. "This...may hurt you," he advised, hesitating.

Enyu turned and looked back at him. "Hurt me, Master," he replied, with a knowing smile. "Fuck me hard."

"Hmmm," Xian grunted, feeling a surge of carnal agitation by the pet's deliberately provocative manner. As he pressed himself up to his portal, he once again desperately wished it was Ju who was about to take in all of him.

Slowly, he penetrated, relishing every sensation. Enyu immediately cried out, staying him for a moment. He ran his hands up and down the pet's hips and thighs, waiting for him to adjust. When Enyu quieted, he inched in a bit more, again eliciting a wail of pain from the Xeronian. Breathing hard, Xian waited again, now feeling a little impatient to feel the pet embrace the totality of his manhood. When Enyu relaxed again, Xian grabbed onto his hips and then forced himself completely inside him, his need now too urgent to ensure the comfort of Iason's pet, who voiced his agony as the Blondie took him completely. Once inside, Xian immediately pulled out and thrust in again, thrilled with the sensation, then again, and again. As Enyu finally began to adjust to him, his vocalizations betrayed his escalating lust.

"Oh," the Blondie breathed, "you're gripping me beautifully."

Panting, Enyu answered by wiggling back against him, offering himself for deeper penetration, an invitation which the Blondie accepted. He increased the cadence of the fuck as his needs mounted, and before he knew it he was at the threshold, and then had pressed beyond, releasing his essence in a moment of unadulterated ecstasy.

Enyu joined him by vigorously pumping himself, his seed shooting across the bed.

Weak with the pleasure of his release, Xian withdrew and lay down on the bed, covering his eyes with his arm. Enyu joined him, and for some moments they lay together, before they both became aroused again.

The Blondie took the Xeronian three times that afternoon before finally departing. Iason greeted him when he finally emerged from the guest suite.

“So. Did my pet treat you well?”

“Like a king,” Xian answered, and for a few moments the two Blondies locked eyes. In that instant a bond was created between them, and a new friendship was born.

“Good,” Iason replied. “Then, I invite you to return whenever you wish, though I advise you wait until his next rut on the new moon.”

“I may just have to accept that invitation,” he replied, grinning. Then he looked around for Juthian, and, not seeing him, nor wanting to inquire about him, he bowed, taking his leave.

So. He was leaving Juthian...without even saying goodbye. Although the Blondie had relished his exploits with Enyu, he would have exchanged the Xeronian for Juthian in an instant. A feeling of profound loss began to sweep over him as he realized that he was going home without him.

He had not anticipated how much he would regret letting Juthian go. And the fact that he had paired with Iason’s exotic pet had only made him realize, too late, what might have been with Juthian.

His romp with Enyu had surpassed his most potent fantasy; the creature had completely enamored him with his provocative manner, and then had taken him, physically, to heights he had never before achieved. But then, he had never paired with anyone before Enyu. Now that he had, he knew he would never be satisfied with only voyeurism. He had tasted what was forbidden and now wanted more.

He would go to the next auction and find the perfect pet, he decided. And yet, even as he formulated this plan in his mind, his thoughts drifted again to Juthian.

To his Ju.

And when he thought of his pet—and he would always think of Ju as his pet, even now, even modified—being touched in some lurid way or another by Iason Mink, he began to feel a little angry with himself for agreeing so readily to give up Juthian. He had been irate with Ju, and was initially flattered when Iason had called,

asking for his pet. But now he was filled with remorse; even more than this, his rooms seemed strangely empty without Juthian there, and Xian felt dreadfully alone.

* * *

Iason spend the morning trying to mentally prepare for his interview with Jupiter. He would have to put his best face on, would have to appear calm and unconcerned. Yet his true feelings were anything but; he was in a near panic over what Jupiter wanted, worried that she would insist he get rid of Riki. Surely even Jupiter had no right to interfere thus in his private life. Yet, it was clear to him now that in sending Enyu to him, Jupiter was asking him to give up his pet.

And he would never do this. He would sooner take on Jupiter herself than allow her to take Riki away from him.

As he brooded over these matters, Odi came on over the intercom, announcing the arrival of Omaki Ghan.

Alarmed, Iason got up and rushed to the door, admitting him personally.

On seeing the Blondie's concerned expression, Omaki smiled. "No need for alarm, Iason. I've not come concerning your mongrel."

Visibly relaxing with this news, Iason then regarded him suspiciously, until his eyes were drawn down to a small person who stared up at him with wide eyes, clutching desperately onto Omaki's tunic.

"Aki, isn't it? Do you remember me?"

Too terrified to speak, Aki hid behind his master, peeping out from behind him.

"Say hello to Iason, Aki," Omaki directed.

"Hello," he said, dutifully, then promptly buried his face in his master's cloak.

Smiling slightly at the boy, Iason nodded to Omaki. "Come in. Would you like a drink?"

“Have you...any coffee, by any chance?” The Blondie looked tired, Iason realized, as though he had not slept.

“Tai.”

“Yes, Master,” Tai answered, immediately rushing in from the kitchen.

“Some coffee, please, for Omaki.”

Tugging on his master’s sleeve, Aki then pleaded for some coffee as well.

“No,” Omaki replied. “No coffee for naughty little boys.”

Pouting, Aki looked suspiciously at Iason as though he were at fault for his inability to procure coffee.

“Maybe next time you’ll mind me when I tell you not to bring drinks near the computer,” he added.

Aki sulked a little at this, not wanting to be reminded of his transgression.

Iason smiled at this interchange, but said nothing.

Now Aki’s gaze gravitated to the corner, where Enyu sat, his robe undone, fondling himself.

“Master!” Aki cried. “Can I go look at the naked man?”

“Don’t let him get too close,” Iason warned. “He’s rutting.”

“Please?” Aki begged.

“Very well. Don’t go past that chair, there, Aki. Do you see which one I’m pointing to?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Stay behind that chair. Mind me, Aki, or I’ll turn you over my knee and give you a spanking. You won’t like it, if I have to do that.”

Flinching a little at this threat, Aki then cautiously made his way over to the chair to get a closer look at Enyu.

Tai brought in the coffee, and Omaki took it with shaking hands.

Now Iason studied him, puzzled. There was something wrong with Omaki. He was not his usual cheerful, teasing self. “So what is it you’ve come to see me about?”

Omaki looked at him, a faraway look pressing into his eyes. “Jupiter sent me a summons,” he replied. He pulled the summons

from his pocket and held it out to Iason, who took it, alarmed. A summons from Jupiter was never a good thing.

Summons 745932

Omaki Ghan

You are hereby ordered to admit your illegal pet to Midas Nursery. You will do so immediately. If this mandate is not met in three days, your pet will be removed from you and you will be publicly whipped for insubordination.

So ordered by Jupiter on this the 445th day of the year 5139.

Iason sighed. "Jupiter summoned me as well. Immediately after our conversation."

"What can I do?"

"You don't have a choice, Omaki. A summons must be obeyed." Omaki shook his head. "No. I won't do it."

"Then he'll be taken all the same and you'll be whipped—or worse—just as the summons says."

Omaki looked at him, his eyes filled with urgency. "Iason. Isn't there something you can do? Jupiter listens to you."

Iason began to shake his head, but was struck by the look in Omaki's eyes. "He means...that much to you?"

Now a more familiar expression pressed into his features and he smiled. "Ah yes. One could say...that he means everything to me. I thought that you, if anyone, might understand."

Aki approached Enyu, who immediately perked up upon seeing him, his eyes dilating. He began stroking himself a little faster.

"Do you need to use the bathroom?" Aki asked.

Enyu smiled. "No."

"What are you doing then?"

"Making myself feel good."

“Why are you showing your private parts?”

“Because I want to.”

“What’s that...necklace you’re wearing?” Aki pointed to his chest, where the beautiful pendant given to him by Hiroshi hung.

“This? Oh...this is very special. Come a little closer and I’ll show it to you.”

And Aki, despite his Master’s stern admonishments to stay behind the chair, was so curious that he stepped forward without thinking.

Enyu immediately seized him, biting his neck, and tugging down his shorts. Aki screamed.

“Aki!” Omaki shouted, and he and Iason both immediately rushed to assist him, as did Katze, who had come running when he heard the boy's scream. Enyu already had the boy face down, bottom bared and ready for penetration when the Blondies rescued him.

Iason whipped out his taming stick and with brutal strokes, beat Enyu, who huddled in the corner and howled his misery. At Iason's direction, Katze lifted him up and pinned to the wall with his arms above his head while the Blondie struck him repeatedly across the back of his legs with his taming stick. The Xeronian yelped like a punished puppy, filling his Master and Katze with pity. Although Iason suspected that Enyu truly could not help himself, he could not let the assault go unpunished.

Omaki scooped up Aki, his initial alarm now changing to fury. “What did I tell you, Aki?” he scolded. Then, propping his leg up on a chair, he pulled the boy over his thigh and, after removing his glove, gave him a sound spanking on his bare bottom, much to Aki’s complete despair. He spanked him perhaps quite a bit harder than he needed to, but he was angry over how close Aki had come to losing something very special that Omaki fully intended to save for himself. Though Omaki had threatened to spank Aki numerous times, he had never actually done so, and Aki wailed his anguish and fear, struggling futilely to escape Omaki’s firm grip.

“You'll learn to mind me, Aki! Naughty boy!”

Spanking Aki had a rather predictable effect on Omaki; as he struck the boy's bottom repeatedly and watched it grow red, blood began rushing to his own loins, and he savored the experience, knowing full well that he would use it later in the privacy of his room. The combination of the boy's kicking and screaming, the smack of his hand on Aki's bottom, the warmth of his half-naked body over his thigh, and the sight of his hot, punished flesh was almost too much, and Omaki's erection was so hard he thought he would burst.

At last the punishments were doled out and both pets were left whimpering. Aki, in particular, took his discipline very hard, continuing to wail as though he was still being punished.

Iason and Omaki sat down, waiting for the crying to subside so they could continue their conversation. Aki stood by his Master, sobbing so pathetically that Iason could not help but smile.

"There now," Omaki said, picking him up to set him on his lap.

Immediately reacting to the unpleasant sensation of anything touching his sore bottom, Aki cried out in dismay, thrusting his pelvis forward and off Omaki's lap as he slid down his leg and then collapsed dramatically, face-down on the floor, where he continued to fuss.

"Aki," Omaki chided, although both Blondies were amused at the boy's performance. "Do you want me to spank you again?"

At this, Aki fell silent, lying limply on the floor as though dead.

Unable to suppress a smile, Iason was reminded suddenly of Riki, wishing desperately his pet was with him. "Perhaps Aki would like to see my fish pond?" he said.

At this, Aki scrambled to his feet, completely recovered, looking up at Omaki with such an expression of hopefulness that the Blondie could not resist allowing him the pleasure.

"Very well," he nodded.

"Juthian."

"Yes, Master," Juthian answered, stepping forward from wall where he had been standing, waiting for Iason's command, and watching the unfolding drama with no small bit of alarm.

“Take Aki out to the gardens and show him the fishpond.”

“Yes, Master,” Juthian replied, bowing. He looked at Aki, and smiled--for the first time since he had arrived at the penthouse. “So you wanna see the fish?”

“Yeah,” Aki said, walking towards him a little hesitantly as he evaluated what sort of threat Juthian posed. His eyes immediately gravitated to the jeweled headdress he wore. “Are you a prince?” he asked.

Juthian smiled. “No. I am only a Furniture.”

“Then why are you wearing a crown?”

Katze, who was standing nearby, leaning against a wall with his arms crossed on his chest, smiled at this.

“It's a headdress, and it was given to me...by my old master.”

Aki looked up at him, suddenly deciding that Juthian wasn't a threat. He slipped his hand into Juthian's, surprising the youth, who looked down at him, smiling. Ju liked the boy.

“Do you remember where the fishpond is?” Katze asked.

“Yes.”

“Can I feed the fish?” Aki shouted, as they made their way down the corridor.

“So,” Omaki began again, crossing his legs and pulling his glove back on. “Isn't there something you can do?”

“Honestly, Omaki, I don't know what you expect from me. I've been summoned myself, and I have no doubt I'm in for a reprimand.”

“I haven't...taken him.”

A little relieved, Iason nodded. “Good. That helps.”

Now Omaki smiled. “Not that I don't fully intend to...one day. But I guess you could say...the time is not quite right.”

Iason pondered this for a moment. “If you send him back to the Nursery, you could retrieve him again when he's old enough.”

Omaki shook his head. “No. I want him with me.” Now he sighed. “If only Yousi were here.”

Although Iason knew he referred to how Yousi had been before his mind was tampered with, Omaki's remark puzzled him. "Why Yousi?"

Lifting his gaze to Iason's face, Omaki smiled. "Do you not remember how Yousi said Jupiter could be taken down?"

A slight jangling of Enyu's chains reminded Iason that the Xeronian was listening. He stood up. "Come with me," he said in a low voice, making for the observatory. Omaki rose and followed him, wondering what Iason had in mind.

When they reached top of the stairs and entered the observatory, Iason turned to him. "Explain what you mean about Yousi. Be specific."

"You...never heard about this?"

"No."

"But...Raoul knew about it...he was the one who--I assumed he would have told you?"

Iason smiled slightly. "Raoul does not reveal to me what Jupiter forbids him to reveal."

"I see. Then, as you may recall, Yousi was my closest friend. He found...something in Jupiter's programming that he believed could be used to shut her down. He did a series of experiments and logged them all; but that was his fatal error. Jupiter pieced together his experiments and figured out what he was up to and...you know the story from there."

His heart beating a little faster, Iason pondered this for a moment. "What happened...to the logs?"

Omaki shook his head. "I only know that he wrote them by hand rather than digitally. In that he was smart, at least. But...surely Raoul would know."

"He probably disposed of them."

"Probably," Omaki conceded. "But," now his voice lowered, "why do you ask?"

For a long moment Iason regarded Omaki, trying to decide whether he should reveal his secret.

Now Omaki laughed. "What are you scheming, Iason?"

“I found...I believe I've identified...a possible weakness.”

“An entry?”

“Possibly.”

“Then...he was right,” Omaki whispered. “I knew it.” He smiled, feeling as though Yousi had won some sort of victory, though it had cost him everything. “And...what are you planning to do with this knowledge?”

“I'll do...whatever may be done...to take Amoi back.”

Omaki raised an eyebrow at this cryptic comment. “You seriously think you can bring Jupiter down?”

“Don't know. But...it's coming to that...for me, at least. And now perhaps...for you.”

“Ah. Taking down Jupiter, is it? You need to work on your ambition, Iason. Your goals are not lofty enough. Perhaps you...have some self-confidence issues that need addressing?”

Iason gazed back at him steadily. “I need to know, Omaki. Would you be with me or against me?”

“Let's see,” Omaki mused. “A revolution, hmmm? By my reckoning that would mean... anarchy, total chaos...the probable disintegration of our entire social structure and the end of Amoian civilization as we know it.” Now he grinned. “Count me in.”

* * *

Raoul lay in bed next to Yui, thinking. The youth had fallen asleep, and Raoul found that he enjoyed watching him sleep. His mind was in turmoil over the events of the past few days. His destroyed painting, his abduction of Riki, Iason's unforgiving wrath. His punishment at Iason's hands seemed surreal; he could not believe he had been so foolish as to abduct Riki.

And now, he had done the unthinkable. He had engaged in a forbidden pairing, one far more illicit than his congress with Iason.

In the space of just a few days, Raoul's world had turned upside down. As he stared at Yui, he realized that nothing would ever be the same for him now. Though he knew he should abandon his

union with the boy, he did not want to. It was difficult to understand, but somehow, Yui filled a place in his heart that had been empty for a long time.

But it was a love that was forbidden. Raoul knew that if Jupiter were to discover them, their worlds would both be torn apart. The irony was that the very warning he had so often annoyed Iason with was now applicable to himself.

It seemed impossible that just a few days could bring so many profound changes to his life.

Yui stirred, his eyes fluttering opening. He startled a little to find Raoul staring down at him.

“You're adorable when you sleep.”

Yui smiled in response to this compliment, blinking up at his master. “Do you want something, Master?”

Raoul answered this by pushing Yui's legs apart with his knees, and sliding on top of him, his erection bumping up against his portal.

Yui instinctively winced.

“You're still too sore, aren't you?” Raoul asked, disappointed.

“I am yours to do with as you please,” Yui replied, bravely.

Raoul smiled at his obedience. “You're a good boy. But I won't hurt you anymore tonight.” With that, he rose up, and straddled Yui's chest, bringing his cock close to Yui's mouth. “Take me in,” he commanded.

Yui obeyed, opening his mouth to pleasure his master.

Throwing his head back, Raoul gasped, then looked down at Yui again, as he watched his organ sink deep into his mouth. Yui wiggled his tongue provocatively against him, eliciting a moan from his Master.

Raoul adjusted his position, widening his legs and letting his weight fall forward on his arms as he began thrusting into Yui's mouth.

“You feel so good,” he gasped. “I'm not going to last long.”

As if to emphasize this point, the Blondie began moaning and grunting, his lust spiraling. “Sweet mother of Amoi,” he breathed.

"I'm coming again, Yui. Now. Drink me. Drink every drop. Oh yess...."

With that, the Blondie released into his new lover's mouth, shuddering.

Yui obeyed his mandate and drank of his Master, enjoying the taste of his hot essence deep in his throat.

Trembling a little, Raoul withdrew and rolled over onto the bed, pulling Yui close to him. "I'm never letting you go now," he murmured.

Smiling, Yui snuggled up close to his Master, feeling secure as the Blondie wrapped his arms around him.

But Raoul was troubled, feeling completely unable to protect either Yui or himself from Jupiter's wrath, should they be discovered. He sighed.

"What is it, Master?" Yui asked, sensing his inner turmoil.

"Yui...what we're doing...is so foolish," he whispered.

Falling silent, Yui brooded on this for a moment, hoping that Raoul would not change his mind now that they had become intimate and decide they could no longer pair.

"I don't care if it's dangerous. For my part...I am willing to take the risk," Yui said.

Raoul answered this by pulling him closer, and kissing his temple.

* * *

Kei waited hour after hour for Guy, and had begun to think his partner wasn't coming back after all. He paced his flat, fuming. Fucking Riki. He was desperate for Guy to return so he could punish him; he had an entire agenda of discipline worked out for him for his transgressions that he was anxious to fulfill. He had a thin branch from a tree that he was converting into a switch, stripping away the bark with a knife, and this activity helped occupy him as he waited.

When Guy finally arrived, he was a little surprised, having by that point assumed that Guy had spent the night with Riki.

"You're still up," Guy remarked, waiting to be let in.

"Where the fuck have you been?" Kei demanded, arms across his chest as he stood in the doorway, blocking his access. "Don't tell me you've been with him this whole time?"

"Are you letting me in or what?" Guy demanded.

Kei stepped aside, though the look on his face was far from welcoming.

"Do you want me to come in or not? Because I don't need a bunch of bullshit now. I'll just go home."

"No," Kei said, quickly, putting a hand behind Guy and pulling him close. "I want you. Stay."

Guy, still horribly aroused from his unconsummated evening with Riki, surprised Kei by responding enthusiastically, rubbing up against him and kissing him.

Excited, Kei kissed him back, furiously, pulling Guy close to him. They continued thus for some moments before either remembered that they were standing with the door open for any passerby to watch. Kei pulled Guy inside, and the door hummed shut. With a fist, he slammed the lock box, which meant Guy couldn't leave without his entering in the correct code.

"You're getting fucked," he asserted, unzipping his pants.

Guy answered this by pulling off his shirt, his muscles flexing. "You're getting fucked, too."

"I don't think so," Kei said, with a smile. "You need some discipline. Don't think I didn't see the way you were looking at Riki. And you've been with him half the night."

He looked away. "Nothing happened."

"If that's true, it's only because you couldn't get him into bed."

Guy fell silent there, a little amazed by Kei's perception.

"I'm right, aren't I? You're so fucking transparent, Guy."

"I've never lied to you about Riki. You know how I feel about him."

With that, Kei struck him across the face, hard. "Shut the fuck up. Undress. Now."

Surprised, Guy stared back at him for a moment, his cheek burning. "You...what did you do that for?"

Now Kei pushed Guy up against a wall, flipping him around and tugging down his pants as he pressed against him from behind. "You're being punished tonight, Guy," he whispered. "We both know why."

Releasing himself, he slid his cock in between Guy's legs, positioning himself at his lover's portal. "I'm gonna fuck you hard," he continued, grabbing onto his ponytail and yanking his head back to whisper in his ear. "And because you've been so naughty, I'm going to discipline you, too."

Guy smiled a little at this, unable to help enjoying his partner's game, and not realizing how angry Kei really was. He closed his eyes, shivering as Kei bit down on his neck. Then he felt his arms being pulled behind him, and suddenly he realized he was bound. Kei had bound his wrists together with a belt, winding the belt around and around and then buckling it tight.

"Hey," he laughed, struggling a little against the belt. "Dammit Kei. Let me go."

"Didn't you hear me? You're being punished," Kei shot back, leading him over to the bed and pushing him roughly down on it. Without his hands to break his fall, Guy fell helplessly, suddenly realizing that his partner wasn't joking about disciplining him. Before he could gather his bearings, Kei had one ankle manacled to the leg of the bed. Now Guy struggled with all his might against him with his other leg, but Kei was able to overpower him and manacle him. Guy was now lying face down, his pants pulled down to his thighs, ankles and wrists firmly bound.

Straining to lift his body and turn to see what Kei was doing, he was alarmed to see his lover standing there, tapping a switch against his hand. "This will teach you to fuck with me," Kei said, with a sinister smile, his eyes glittering darkly.

"What the fuck is that?"

“This? Oh...yes, I spent the whole evening on this, especially for you. This, Guy, is a switch.”

“You wouldn't fucking dare!”

“Oh, wouldn't I?” He leaned forward, smiling. “I assure you, I would...and I will. Not to worry--it's quite smooth. You won't have splinters.”

“Dammit Kei! Untie me!”

“I will. After you've been sufficiently punished.”

“I said nothing happened!”

“Whether or not something happened makes no difference to me. You're being punished for wanting something to happen.”

“That's fucking twisted! Shit...my circulation's getting cut off!”

“Then I suggest you stop struggling. Accept the fact that you're in deep shit, Guy, and take your punishment like a man.”

“You're going to regret this. I fucking swear.”

“Oh? I don't think so. No...by time I'm finished with you, you and I will have come to a...certain understanding.”

“I'm gonna beat the fucking shit out of you!”

Kei laughed. “I'd like to see you try. Enough of this,” he smiled. “It's time for your punishment.”

“Kei!”

With that, Kei whipped back his arm and brought the switch down, hard, on Guy's ass.

“Fuck! Dammit Kei!”

Another strike.

“Shit! That fucking hurt!”

“Good.” He struck again, this time drawing blood.

“Fucking asshole!”

Now Kei struck him extra hard, in retribution for his comment.

Wincing, Guy struggled to not to cry out, and so quieted, a small agonized sound escaping his lips with each strike. Kei's anger became more and more evident with each strike; he struck him so hard that, finally, Guy could not suppress an anguished cry.

“Now, this is just a taste of what's in store for you,” Strike! “If you fuck him, Guy.” Strike!

“Please,” Guy whimpered. “Please stop, Kei.”

“What, begging already?” Kei laughed. “Poor thing. This is going to be harder for you than I thought.”

Strike!

“Shit. Kei, please. God...it fucking hurts so bad.”

“So...I'm not your official boyfriend, then?” Kei's voice quivered with anger. “What exactly am I, then?”

Guy didn't answer, mortified that Kei had heard his comment to Riki.

“Just a good fuck? Is that it?”

Strike!

“Kei,” Guy whispered, weakly. Tears were now stinging his eyes, despite all his efforts to retain his composure.

“I've given you everything you asked for, Guy. And then in one night you're ready to throw it all away.” Strike!

“Please!”

“So I mean nothing to you? After everything we've shared? Riki only has to set foot in Depravities and you're ready to fucking DUMP ME?”

Strike!

“It wasn't...like that!” Guy tried, desperately.

“Oh? Can you honestly tell me you didn't try to at least kiss him?”

“I didn't! I swear!”

Kei laughed. “Fucking liar.” Strike!

Now Guy cried out openly.

“You were gone for hours. And I know you weren't just talking about local politics. Don't lie to me, Guy.” Now his voice lowered to a hiss. “I could taste him in your mouth.”

Strike!

“All we did is kiss! I swear!”

“So now you swear it was just kissing, and before you swore it was nothing at all? Now I'm going to have to punish you extra hard for lying to me.”

Strike! Strike! Strike!

Guy cried out, straining against his restraints. "Shit! Please stop, Kei! Please!"

"I told you. You're being punished. You need to suffer for what you've done."

"I am suffering," he pleaded. His ass was covered with switch marks, the skin broken and bleeding.

"Not enough." Strike! Strike!

Now Guy began to weep, for the first time since his childhood. He had not known he was even capable of crying.

"That's it," Kei whispered. "This isn't going to end until you submit to me, Guy, and obey my directives."

"What...dir...directives?" Guy stammered.

"You are mine, Guy. And yes, I am your official boyfriend. You'd better fucking understand that. You'll let Riki know that, too. No more fooling around with him, Guy. I fucking mean it. Now. I'm not finished punishing you. It's time for the second part."

With that, Kei tossed the switch aside, lowering his pants to release himself completely, then climbed onto Guy and, in one swift movement, penetrated him fully, as hard as he could.

Guy cried out, having never been taken without preparation before.

Kei nuzzled his neck as he fucked him, hard, grabbing onto his ponytail and pulling back on his head a bit. "You're mine, Guy. And I think I've treated you very well. But this is what you can expect from me when you fuck with me. You will be punished. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Guy gasped.

"And I'm not just talking about fucking him, Guy. If you so much as look at him the wrong way, or flirt with him the way you shamelessly did tonight, you can expect swift and painful retribution. Is all this perfectly clear?"

"Kei," he whispered.

"I said," Kei hissed, fucking him harder, "is THIS FUCKING PERFECTLY CLEAR?"

“Yes.” Defeated, he submitted to Kei, tears streaming down his face.

“Good boy,” Kei whispered, nibbling on his earlobe. “Oh....you feel so good, Guy. I'm gonna come here real soon. And then...I'll suck you off. Would you like that?”

“Yes,” Guy admitted.

“I thought so. Now, I think we've accomplished a lot this evening, wouldn't you agree? I think...we're starting to come to a nice...understanding about what exactly our relationship is, wouldn't you say so?” Panting, Kei began his ascent. “Ohh....yes...I'm going to come...” Kei released Guy's hair and slipped his hands under his pelvis. “Aw, yeah. Just like this...so fucking lovely.” With that, Kei grunted a few times and then ejaculated, shuddering from what was surely the best orgasm he'd ever had in his life, while Guy lay quietly beneath him, feeling a bit frightened and confused, and for the first time in his life, completely overpowered.

* * *

Riki awoke alone, feeling completely disoriented. “Iason?” he called, before he realized where he was. Sighing, he sat up and lit up a smoke, then pushed the “coffee” button next to his bed, wondering what would happen.

He heard what sounded like coffee brewing. Fascinated, he watched as a tiny, box-shaped robot emerged from the kitchen, gliding across the floor towards him, the smell of fresh coffee perking him up. The robot rolled to the side of the bed and stopped. Its top slid open, and there was a fresh pot of coffee and a cup.

“Fucking awesome,” he grinned, pouring himself some.

He was trying to decide what to do next. Guy had been rather insistent the night before and Riki knew he would not be able to keep him at bay much longer. If he invited Guy over again, there would be definite expectations. He puzzled over his own hesitancy in pairing with his old partner, surprised by his conflicting feelings.

It wasn't just because of Kei--although Riki felt a small stab of reflex jealousy, he was strangely rather unaffected by the knowledge that Guy was pairing with someone else. No, it was more than this.

His feelings for Guy...had changed.

Although he had become easily aroused when Guy had kissed him, Riki knew this was nothing more than the same reaction he'd have if anyone remotely attractive kissed him. Strangely, though Riki was relieved of the pet ring, he felt as though his body still belonged to Iason, that the Blondie's hold on him continued whether he wore a thousand pet rings or none at all. And not just that. Riki felt...as though he did not want to share his body with anyone else. Anyone other than Iason.

This revelation was disturbing to the free-spirited mongrel. He hated the thought of what he had become. He was the pet of Iason Mink, through and through. And he knew that if Guy learned of this, he would lose all respect for him.

Now Riki stared down at the little robot that sat quietly at his feet. He drained his cup and set it back inside the unit. Immediately the top slid shut and the robot spun around and slowly returned to the kitchen. Riki smiled, almost feeling envious of the little bot, whose purpose in life was so simple and clear.

He debated avoiding his gang but knew that would be an unforgivable breach of courtesy. Wasn't that why he'd come to Midas? To see Bison...and Guy?

Then...why was he so ambivalent about everything?

"Fuck," he sighed, shaking his head. He felt as though he was a stranger to himself.

Rising, he showered and dressed quickly, putting on the same clothes he had worn the day before. He felt grimy doing so--his years in Eos had inculcated a taste for better grooming, and he decided that a shopping trip for new clothes was warranted. He left the hotel, making for the shopping district.

As he rode through the streets of Midas, the mongrel was struck with how different everything seemed to him now. It was hard to identify exactly what had changed--he only knew that the

city seemed less grand than he had remembered. Tanagura had spoiled things for him; in comparison to the fabulous city of the Elites, Midas seemed rather drab.

He pulled in front of The Chameleon, the posh shop for trendy street-wear that had always been well beyond Riki's means. Now, he couldn't help but smile knowing that he could purchase whatever he wanted. As the shockguard laser encircled his bike, his arrival was noticed by the shop owner, Tagira Nomartsu, who immediately recognized the value of the vehicle, and rushed to greet him as he entered.

"How might I help you, Sir?" he asked, startling a little when Riki removed his helmet.

A mongrel? With a Skywalker?

"I need street-wear for the week. The best you have--but nothing too flashy. And...mostly black."

"Certainly," Tagira replied, eagerly. "We have a new line in by Zoto Chakra, and very interesting imports from Xeron, Aristia, and Alpha Zen."

"Let me see them all," Riki replied.

"Of course, Sir," Tagira answered, then hesitated. He wasn't in the mood to spend an afternoon waiting a customer who didn't have the means to pay, and now he wondered if he was wasting time with the mongrel. The bike was probably stolen.

Riki smiled at him, immediately guessing why the shop owner hesitated. "Would you like to see my credit line?" he asked.

"Oh! Well...if that, would not be too much inconvenience to you," Tagira replied. He whipped out his credit board, and Riki placed his hand on the panel, his identification immediately registering.

Tagira stared at the portfolio readout in disbelief--and then alarm. This was the pet of Iason Mink, the head of the Syndicate. With an open-ended credit line. He read the Alert, trembling a little, then looked up at the mongrel.

"It...it is an honor, Sir...Sir," now Tagira paused, unsure what to call him if he was forbidden to identify him by his pet number.

“Riki,” the mongrel finished, smiling.

“Sir Riki. Yes. I...you can have a seat over there, and I'll show you what we have.”

“Cool.” The mongrel sat down, thrilled to be waited on. His attention was drawn to a case of body jewelry, and he smiled, wondering what Iason's would reaction would be if he pierced his nipples or his eyebrow. His eyes were drawn to a pair of earring studs, an amber-golden color that glowed iridescently, revealing other colors that shifted and changed almost magically.

They would look nice on Iason, he realized, and then, without considering the matter further, pointed to the case. “I'll take these, too.”

Tagira rushed to the case and opened it, nodding his approval. “Those just arrived from Aristia. They're beautiful, aren't they?”

“Yeah.”

Now Tagira regarded him for a moment. “Do you...want to have your ears pierced, then?”

“No,” Riki replied, smiling. “They're...for someone.”

“I see.” Tagira pondered this for a moment, wondering if the pet was buying them for his master, or for someone else. He retrieved the earrings and handed them to Riki, then retreated to the racks to make some initial selections for the mongrel.

Riki sat down again, staring down at the beautiful gems. He knew Iason would love them. And...he wanted to give the Blondie something to show his gratitude for his week of freedom.

His...freedom. Now Riki sighed, enjoying the feeling of knowing he could go wherever he wanted, and do whatever struck his fancy. He could stay out as late as he wanted, fuck whomever he pleased, drink until he passed out.

Tonight he was going to enjoy himself. Whether that meant pairing with Guy or perhaps someone else, Riki intended to loosen up a little. He was entitled. No doubt Iason had already enjoyed Enyu, he thought, with no small amount of annoyance at himself for being stupid enough to suggest it. Images of their union crept into

his mind and he pushed them out of his thoughts, not caring to dwell on the details.

Tagira returned with an armload of choices, and Riki spent the next hour making his purchases, which Tagira suggested be sent to his room. The mongrel accepted, realizing suddenly that his bike offered little storage space, other than a small compartment designed for sunglasses and other small items.

He returned to the hotel and immediately changed into his favorite outfit among his purchases: black leather skintight pants and snakeskin calf-high boots, with a tank that was covered with slits, reminding him of someone who'd gotten into a bad skirmish with a knife. He especially liked the belt with the dragon-head buckle, and the wrist cuff studded with spikes.

Dressing quickly, he stood for a moment in front of the mirror, admiring himself. He looked good, and he knew it. Smiling, he left the hotel and made for Depravities, determined to have a good time.

His arrival was acknowledged by many of those standing outside the club. The rumor that Riki the Dark had returned had spread fast, and now he was watched with a good deal of curiosity. So many strange rumors had circulated regarding the mongrel, and for him to suddenly show up, displaying such affluence, was of great interest to many.

Riki passed by the onlookers, oblivious to the attention he generated. He removed his helmet and stepped inside the club.

This time, he was immediately hailed.

"Riki," Noris called, motioning to him.

Riki sauntered toward the table, his eyes gravitating to Guy, who sat, his eyes averted. Kei sat next to him, his arm possessively thrown over his shoulders. Guy did not look up. Riki's gaze shifted to Kei, who watched his approach with unveiled contempt.

"You're back!" Sid exclaimed. "I was hoping you'd come. Let me bum one of your smokes!"

"Hey yeah, me too," Noris chimed.

Grinning, Riki threw his pack on the table. "You can have them," he said. "I'll order more with our drinks."

"You buying again?" Luke asked, grinning.

"Holy shit. Look at his outfit," Noris remarked, suddenly.

Everyone looked, even Guy.

"Wow. You look fine, Riki," Sid said.

"What the fuck does that mean?" Noris demanded.

"What? You're the one who noticed him first!"

Noris punched him in the arm.

"Ow," Sid complained, holding his arm.

Sliding in next to Luke, Riki managed to lock gazes momentarily with Guy. Something was up with him; Riki could see this instantly. Guessing that he'd gotten into a fight with his new lover, Riki turned to Kei, who was staring at him.

"See something you like?" he quipped.

"No," Kei replied.

"Hmphf," Riki snorted, then, under his breath, "asshole."

"What's that?" Kei demanded, his voice rising.

"I said, asshole."

Now Kei leaned forward, removing his arm from Guy. "Fucking say that to my face, you little prick."

"I already said it to your face, or was that your ass? You're so ugly it's hard to tell."

A complete lie; the youth was stunningly handsome; but Riki hated him already.

"You piece of shit." Now Kei leapt to his feet.

"Bring it on," Riki retorted.

"Hey now," Guy interjected, trying to calm his lover down.

"Yeah, chill out, bothaya," Noris remarked, lighting a smoke.

"Let's not get off to a bad start here."

At that moment the attendant arrived.

"Can I bring you anything, Sir?" he asked, addressing Riki.

Noris snorted at this appellation, once again finding it amusing. This seemed to diffuse the situation between Riki and Kei. The dark-haired youth sat back down, but continued to glare at Riki.

"A round of drinks for everyone. I'll have a brandy."

“A brandy, woohoo,” Sid teased. “Oh! Perhaps I'll have some wine.”

“We don't serve wine at Depravities,” the attendant replied, not realizing he was joking.

“I'll have a brandy, too,” Noris said.

“Me too,” Luke said.

“We're all having brandy,” Sid announced.

“And...bring me six packs of Dark Baccalias.”

This brought cheers and smiles of appreciation from everyone but Kei.

“I'll have a stout,” Kei interjected. “Separate tab. One for both of us,” now he gestured to Guy.

“And... what will you have?” the attendant asked Guy.

“I'll have...I'll have a stout, too,” he answered, quietly.

Kei smiled at this, shooting a triumphant look at Riki, who shrugged. “Why the fuck should I care what he orders?” he murmured.

“What's that?” Kei demanded. “Were you addressing me?”

“Very good. I'll be back momentarily,” the attendant said, looking at Riki. “Shall I...put everything on your portfolio again?”

“Yes.”

“Excellent, Sir.”

Snorting as though this was the most hilarious thing he'd ever heard, Noris now proceeded to tease Riki relentlessly. “So, Sir Riki, I think you'll find our brandy here is most excellent.”

“Fucking asshole,” Riki grinned.

“I said, were you addressing me?” Kei said again, louder.

“No. Low-life pond scum like you aren't worth my time,” Riki responded.

“That's it.” Now Kei leapt to his feet again, reaching across the table to grab Riki's shirt.

“Get your fucking hands off me!” Riki hissed.

“Fucking make me!”

Now everyone at the table pulled the two mongrels apart again.

“You two need to...get along,” Sid said.

“Yeah. Why don't you kiss and make up,” Noris snickered.

“I'd sooner kiss your ass than that mug,” Riki replied.

“Oh?” Now Noris stood up, making as if to unzip his pants.

Everyone laughed, except Kei. “Let's take this outside,” he said, his voice thick with anger. “Come on. You and me.”

“You're on!” Riki replied.

“Whoa. Settle down, you two. Why don't you...resolve this over a game of pool?” Noris suggested.

Riki smiled at this suggestion. “He doesn't have balls to challenge the best pool player in Midas.”

Kei scoffed at this. “The best? You've been gone a long time, Riki. I'll have you know I'm undefeated.”

“As am I,” Riki replied, coldly.

“It's settled then!” Noris announced. “After we have our drinks, it's Kei versus Sir Riki!”

The two rivals glared at one another for a long moment. Kei finally broke away, leaning down to whisper something in Guy's ear. The expression on Guy's face was inscrutable, and Riki studied his old partner, trying to make out what was different about him. Something had happened, that much he was sure of. He'd never seen Guy look so...submissive and subdued. Now his gaze shifted back to Kei. He watched the way he put his hand possessively on Guy's thigh, brushing his thumb back and forth. No doubt Kei had given him a hard time about spending the previous evening with him.

Riki found that he hated Kei. It wasn't even so much jealousy over Guy. It was a personal thing, the way he challenged his every move and remark. He couldn't wait to give him a sound thrashing at the pool table.

The attendant returned with their drinks and smokes they all sat for some moments, enjoying them, though one pack remained untouched on the table, as Kei refused to accept the mongrel's gift. Kei and Riki stared darkly at one another, both of them realizing that their rivalry promised an inevitable confrontation. It was just a matter of time.

Secrets and Lies

Iason drank two glasses of wine to calm himself before entering Jupiter's sanctum. He had spent the morning fretting over what Jupiter wanted but now had managed to put on a demeanor that conveyed a relaxed attitude he was far from feeling. Finally, precisely at noon, he entered her chambers, carrying a third, half-finished glass of wine.

He immediately bowed, a little lower than usual.

"Sit down, Iason," Jupiter said.

He obeyed, the effect of the alcohol now calming him. He crossed his legs in a leisurely fashion, taking another sip of his wine as though completely unconcerned that he had been summoned. In fact, his heart was beating so fast he could hardly think straight.

"So...what is it you wanted to talk to me about?" he asked, with a little smile.

"You know quite well. You cannot have two pets. I want you to dispose of the mongrel."

Iason laughed. "Dispose of him?"

"Send him to brothel or an open club--I don't care which. The pet I gave you should be sufficient to relieve your needs."

"If I am to dispose of one my pets," Iason said, softly, "I should prefer that I keep the mongrel."

"Why?" Jupiter demanded.

"I appreciate your gift; it was quite thoughtful. But...to be quite honest, he has been a little disruptive and difficult to manage."

"And the mongrel is not disruptive or difficult to manage?"

Iason laughed. "I see your point. But...the Xeronian has a rutting period, as you know, and this has proved to be somewhat...awkward."

Now Jupiter shifted, and Iason steeled himself as she transformed and moved across the room to him, reforming to hold his face.

"Do not lie to me, Iason. You have enjoyed the pet; I've watched you."

Startling a little at this, Iason lowered his eyes, wondering what Jupiter meant. Was she spying on him?

"Your persistence in keeping this mongrel mystifies me, especially as I have made it quite clear to you my position regarding him."

Now Iason looked up, braving a reply. "Please, Jupiter. Grant me this small indiscretion?"

Jupiter was quiet for a moment, studying him. "Why...does this pet mean so much to you?"

"I...don't know." Iason bowed his head again, ashamed.

"Very well. You may keep him for one more year, Iason. And then I expect you to acquire a new pet without my having to remind you."

Iason nodded, grateful for the reprieve but wondering what he would do when the year had passed.

"Then, you will relocate the Xeronian or return him to me."

"As you wish."

"There is something else on your mind," Jupiter commented, after a pause.

Iason blinked, surprised. How could she tell? "Yes," he confessed.

"Tell me."

"Omaki Ghan came to me. You...summoned him?"

"Yes. He has acquired an illegal pet."

"Yes, he is far too young," Iason agreed. "But, he came to me, hoping that I would speak to you on his behalf. He has developed a special attachment to his pet--Aki."

“You should know better than anyone how ill-advised that is.”

“Yes. But, his concern is that the boy will not be well cared for in the Midas Nursery. Surely you can see his point.”

“He may appoint a Guardian for the four year interim. Because you have come to me, I will allow him one month to make suitable arrangements.”

“A Guardian?” Iason shook his head, having rarely heard this term mentioned and never, to his knowledge, actually practiced.

“Yes. A caretaker. Review Section 116.45 of the General Code. Be aware that there are very specific rules of conduct for guardianship and that failure to comply with these rules will result in swift disciplinary intervention.”

“I understand,” Iason said, softly.

“Good.” Now Jupiter shifted again, disintegrating to return to her platform, where she rematerialized in statuesque form.

Iason rose as if to leave.

“There is something more I need to discuss with you.”

Surprised, Iason sat back down, waiting.

“There is alarming news from Alpha Zen. A young commander has seized control of the Senate and, with his entire army, marched into Ultanum, claiming the capitol his own.”

“He...claims to be Emperor?” Iason whispered, stunned. The seat of Emperor had remained vacant for over five hundred years; Alpha Zen was an oligarchy, run by the senate Elites.

“He has not claimed the title of Emperor but it appears this is merely a formality. Apparently he is extraordinarily popular and has been highly successful in his campaigns in the fourth quadrant so has the backing of the military. But the senators and ambassadors are all in a fury over it, and the entire region is considered unstable.”

“I see. This will...certainly affect the trade conference,” Iason murmured, considering the matter.

“Perhaps. That is not why I am bringing the matter to your attention.”

Iason looked up, waiting.

“His name is Commander Khosi.”

For a moment the name did not register, and then, suddenly, Iason recognized it.

Khosi.

His lips parted slightly.

“Yes. Anori’s brother, Voshka.”

Iason shook his head, as though not quite believing what he was hearing. “What...should I do?”

“No action is required. I am simply informing you of the situation. You...may go, Iason.”

With that, the Blondie rose, bowing slightly before leaving, finding that he was trembling with this news. He did not know what it meant or how it would affect him, but something about the mere mention of the name Khosi set his heart racing.

As he headed back to his own chambers, he saw Raoul down on the mainframe level. It was the first time he had seen Raoul since their encounter at the Taming Towers; Raoul had missed several days of work. As he approached him, Raoul suddenly straightened, as though sensing him, then turned and looked directly at him.

Iason came closer and then stopped, and for a long moment neither of them spoke.

Finally Raoul broke the tension, his brow furrowed with concern. “Iason. Something...is something wrong?”

“Come with me,” he replied, his voice barely a whisper.

Raoul immediately fell in beside him, wondering if Iason was still angry. He was clearly upset--that much Raoul was certain.

As soon as they stepped into Iason's chambers and the door hummed close, Iason turned to him.

“There's...a development. In Alpha Zen.”

Visibly relaxing at this, Raoul raised his eyebrows. “Oh?” He was glad that Iason's emotions were apparently no longer directed at him.

“A commander has seized control of the Senate and declared himself ruler of Alpha Zen.”

“Surely not,” Raoul replied, smiling. “Are you serious?”

“Raoul.” Now Iason leaned forward a little, his eyes widening. “It's...Anori's brother.”

At the mention of Anori's name, Raoul fell silent, the blood draining from his face. “His...brother?” Raoul was not aware that Anori even had a brother.

“Jupiter just informed me. Voshka Khosi.”

“But,” Raoul said, after a long moment, “what can he possibly know?”

“I don't know.” Iason's voice quivered with emotion.

Now Raoul lowered his voice. “Iason. There's no reason to overreact. As long as we both remain calm, we have nothing to fear.”

Iason nodded.

Raoul shifted his weight and leaned in closer. “Let me help you however I can. Iason...dare I hope... that you have forgiven me?”

The Blondie closed his eyes and sighed. “Don't push me, Raoul.”

Pulling back a little, Raoul fell silent.

Now Iason opened his eyes, looking directly at him. “I meant what I said before. You will submit to me in all things, or I shall have you transferred out of Eos.”

Raoul shook his head. “What have you asked for, that I have failed to give you?”

“Nothing yet. But I mean...when I ask for it, Raoul, you will give it.”

The Blondie shrugged, his eyes clouded with confusion. “Then...is there something you want from me now, Iason?”

“Yes.” Now Iason leaned forward. “I want your loyalty...and your support.”

“Both of those you already have,” Raoul answered, puzzled. “Though...what do you mean by loyalty?”

“I mean...you will back me in all matters from this day forward.”

Raoul nodded. “As you wish.”

“In all matters, Raoul. Even if what I ask you goes against your...personal beliefs.”

At this, Raoul tilted his head, a little smile curling his lips. “Against my personal beliefs? What...are you scheming, Iason?”

“Give me your word, Raoul.”

“You have it. And I would have given it to you without your threat, Iason.”

Now Iason studied Raoul for a long moment, his eyes gravitating to a series of marks on his neck. “You...have a new lover, Raoul?” he whispered, finally.

At this, Raoul's face darkened, and he looked away.

“I see. But then...that is your own business.” With that, Iason turned and made for his desk, dismissing Raoul with a wave of his gloved hand.

“Iason--”

“That is all, Raoul. Go.”

Raoul backed away, his mind a turmoil of emotions. As he left, he dared a last look over his shoulder and caught a glimpse of Iason, just as the door hummed closed. Iason was leaning against his desk, staring at the floor.

* * *

“Let's do this,” Kei said, rising to his feet.

“Yes...let's.” Riki stood up as well, returning Kei's gaze coldly.

The two rivals made their way over to the billiard table, followed by Noris, Sid, Luke, and Guy, who gathered around and began placing bets.

“100 on Riki,” Noris said.

“100 on Kei,” Sid announced. “You in, Luke?”

Luke shrugged. “I'll put 50 on Kei.”

“50? Cheapskate,” Noris teased.

“What about you, Guy?” Sid prodded.

Guy did not answer right away. Both Riki and Kei regarded him expectantly, but he refused to look at either of them. Finally, he looked up, an inexplicable look in his eyes. "I'll pass."

"Coward," Riki scoffed. "Fucking take a stand, why don't ya."

Kei slammed his cue down on the table. "Don't talk to him like that!"

"I can talk to whoever I bloody well please, however I bloody well want!"

"That's it. I'm gonna fucking wipe the pavement with your ass."

"Bring it on!" Riki shouted, and the two of them started at each other again.

The others once again immediately pulled them apart before a fight ensued, trying to make light of the situation by teasing them.

"Come on now, Sir Riki," Noris said. "This is hardly the behavior I expect from a gentleman of your stature."

"He fucking looks at me the wrong way, and I'll bloody kill him," Riki warned.

"I'd like to see you try," Kei snorted.

"You--"

"Riki," Guy interrupted suddenly. "Let it go."

"What? Why the hell should I let it go?" Riki demanded.

"Because...I'm asking you to."

Guy looked at him with such intensity that Riki backed off, shrugging. "Yeah. Whatever." He turned back to Kei, hand on his hip. "So we playing or what?"

Now Kei smiled, pleased with Guy's behavior, and feeling a little cocky. "Sure. You break."

Riki suppressed a smile at this, chalking up his cue and then, with disarming ease, broke the nest, sending four balls squarely into the corner pockets.

"Yes!" Noris cheered.

Smiling smugly, Riki continued, pocketing two more balls.

"Shit!" Sid cursed.

Kei watched this performance uneasily, his smile fading a bit. His phone buzzed and he snapped it open, irritated.

“Yeah?”

Immediately his expression changed, his eyes widening. “Shit. All right. I’ll be there...in about half an hour.”

He flipped the phone close, watching Riki clear the table with no small amount of annoyance.

“Yeah, well. I got an errand to run anyways.” He tossed his cue on the table.

“What, you’re just quitting?” Sid demanded.

Riki straightened, a smile tugging at his lips. “He knows he’s beat.”

“Fuck you, you little brat,” Kei snapped. He turned to Guy. “It’s a big order. I may not be back until late.”

Guy shrugged. “And I may not be there when you get back.”

“What?” Kei put his hands on his hips. “What the fuck does that mean?”

Guy turned and moved away. Now Kei came up behind him, putting his arms around him and whispering in his ear, “Remember what I told you.” With that he gave him a little spank, eliciting a wince from his sore partner.

Riki’s eyes narrowed as he watched this. He knew well that look of pain, having spent many a day suffering from Iason’s merciless arm. Guy had been punished...of that much he was certain. And he was also certain...by who.

Now Kei whispered something else in Guy’s ear, to which Guy responded by breaking away.

“That’s enough, Kei,” he snapped.

Kei stood with his arms across his chest. “I’ll decide when it’s enough.”

“Back off,” Guy growled.

“Ohh,” Kei laughed brokenly. “You’re in for it tonight.”

“No. I’m not.” Guy’s eyes gleamed darkly as he took a stand. “I’m not coming over tonight. And what happened last night...will never happen again.”

“We’ll see about that,” Kei said, softly, reaching out to grab Guy’s arm.

“Fucking don’t touch me,” Guy hissed, yanking his arm away.

A little surprised, Kei stood for a moment, glowering. “Get your jacket. We’re leaving. Now.”

“No. I’m not going.”

“Guy,” Kei said, his voice shaking. “Did I not make myself clear last night?”

“Yes,” Guy answered. “You did. And I’m making myself clear now: we’re over. Fuck off.”

At this, Kei began to visibly shake, his face darkening. “Get your ass outside NOW.”

Now Riki walked over to the couple, standing beside Guy with his arms crossed on his chest.

“He told you to fuck off. Which word didn’t you understand?”

Kei turned to Riki, glaring menacingly. “I strongly advise you to STAY THE FUCK OUT OF THIS.”

“And I strongly advise you to go fuck yourself and your whore of a sister, too!”

With that, Kei rushed toward Riki, swinging. Riki dodged him, punching him in the stomach and then the face, and then kicking him. Kei fell to his knees, trying to catch his breath, and Riki started in again, beating him to the floor. Suddenly he just let loose, releasing all his frustration onto Kei’s body. He felt his arms restrained and realized that Noris and Sid were pulling him off Kei, who was now lying motionless on the floor.

“Let’s split,” Noris said. “Before the police get here.”

The group immediately dispersed. Guy leaned over and whispered in Riki’s ear, “Come on.”

Nodding, Riki followed him, the two of them quickly retrieving their helmets and then dashing outside as a crowd began to form around Kei. The rest of Bison had already taken off. They got on their bikes and sped off into the night, making for Riki’s hotel.

When they arrived, Riki took off his helmet, turning to Guy. “I’m sorry I beat up your unofficial boyfriend.”

Guy smiled, shrugging. “He had it coming.”

Riki laughed. "I have to say...I never thought I'd see you taking it."

"I took it from you, didn't I?"

"But that was...a mutual taking arrangement," Riki replied, grinning.

"It was mutual with Kei too...up until recently."

"How recently?"

"Just since you came along."

"Let me guess. You got your ass whipped for visiting me last night, right?"

At this, Guy stared back at him, surprised.

"I'm right, aren't I?"

Ashamed, Guy looked away. "You wouldn't...understand."

"Don't be so sure," Riki replied, softly.

Guy didn't reply, his face darkening.

"Anyway...let's go inside."

Nodding, Guy fell in beside him as they entered the hotel. At the front desk the hotel manager, Chota, made a slight bow to him. "Welcome back, Sir Riki," he murmured.

Riki shot him a heart-stopping grin, eliciting a look of appreciation from the manager, who watched him until he was no longer within his line of vision. Chota shook his head, smiling. He had, of course, heard the gossip over Iason's choice of a mongrel as a pet, but in his view, Riki the Dark was simply stunning--exactly the sort of pet Chota would have selected for himself. He had very different feelings toward the street-smart looking male that accompanied him, feeling Riki could do far better. He wondered over Iason's relaxed permissions in letting his pet wander freely through Midas and bed whomever he chose. Chota knew of no other Elite who gave his pet such freedoms, nor such an impressive credit portfolio. But then...there were few pets like Riki the Dark. In the elevator, Riki and Guy gazed at one another, smiling.

"What?" Riki asked.

"What do you mean, what?"

"What are you smiling at?"

“What are you smiling at?”

“I’m smiling cuz you’re smiling.”

“You were smiling first.”

“Hmmm.”

Encouraged by Riki’s relaxed manner, Guy moved forward, reaching out to rest his hand on the wall behind Riki and then leaning closer. Riki met his gaze steadily, deciding that, tonight, he was not going to resist Guy. After all, wasn’t that the whole reason he’d come back to Midas?

Sensing Riki’s reception, Guy moved closer, leaning down to kiss him. It was a long, slow, gentle kiss that grew increasingly more passionate. Excited, Guy pressed his body up against his old partner, breaking away to kiss Riki’s neck. Riki closed his eyes, gasping.

“Riki,” Guy breathed. “I want you.”

The elevator door opened at the top floor, and Riki moved away, looking back over his shoulder in an inviting way.

Grinning, Guy followed him.

As soon as they were inside, it was as though a flood of passion was let loose. Guy pushed Riki up against the door, running his hands up and down his body.

“Oh,” he moaned, “Oh yeah, Riki. God yeah. I need you. I want you so bad.”

Riki reached up and flicked the lights off that had automatically come on when they’d entered.

“Turn them back on,” Guy demanded.

“I prefer it dark.”

“Since when?” Guy flipped them back on, smiling. “I wanna see you.”

“Fuck you,” Riki grinned, flipping them off again. “It’s happening in the dark or not at all.”

Guy sighed, then began ripping Riki’s clothes off.

“Hey! These were expensive,” Riki complained as Guy ripped his shirt.

“You can fucking buy another one. You’re loaded.” Guy began kissing his bare chest, immediately gravitating to his left nipple, flicking it with his tongue just the way Riki liked.

“Oh shit,” Riki whispered, closing his eyes.

“That’s right. I haven’t forgotten.” Guy raked his hands down Riki’s body, then fumbled with his pants zipper. “Take these off. Let me suck you...you know you want me to.”

Biting his lip, Riki complied, his hands trembling as he unzipped and lowered his pants.

“Oh Riki,” Guy breathed. “You’re so ready for me, aren’t you?” His warm hand encircled his shaft, sending shivers down Riki’s back. The mongrel was fully erect, twitching in Guy’s hand.

It was all so familiar, and his body responded as though the old lovers had never been apart. Riki gasped as Guy’s tongue began exploring him. He rested his hands on his head, one hand deftly reaching behind his head to undo his ponytail so he could run his hands through Guy’s silky-soft hair. He let his head fall back against the door as he began to pant. It felt so good and he was incredibly aroused.

As he enjoyed the sensations coursing through his body, Riki found that his thoughts inexplicably drifted to Iason. He could not help himself; he began fantasizing about the Blondie fucking him in various ways, dwelling for a bit on the afternoon he had disciplined Iason over the bed. He also couldn’t help but compare Guy’s technique--although admittedly quite excellent--with Iason’s, finding that he missed the Blondie’s distinctive style, the way his tongue quivered rapidly against him, the way he would look up at him, his sapphire blue eyes smoldering with lust as he sucked him slowly, deliberately, his fingers exploring him in all the right places....

“Oh yeah,” he groaned.

Encouraged, Guy gave his best performance, eliciting moans of appreciation from his old pairing partner.

Riki shifted his position, moving his hands to the side of Guy’s head, a signal Guy remembered well. “I’m gonna come,” he

whispered, preparing to pull Guy off him, as he knew his old lover did not care to swallow.

Guy surprised him by grabbing onto his wrists to stay him.

Startled, Riki looked down. "Guy," he began, then suddenly cried out, his whole body contracting as he ejaculated. Guy drank him completely, much to Riki's amazement and utter pleasure.

"Fuck yeah," he whispered, as he slowly recovered from the spasms of pleasure rushing through his body like waves. "Guy...that was...fucking awesome."

Smiling, Guy stood up.

"You...never used to..."

"Yeah well." Guy wiped his mouth, grinning. "Some things have changed these two years."

Riki smiled at the irony of this remark, saying nothing.

Now Guy tilted Riki's chin up to him. "So...now can I take you, Riki?"

"All right."

Excited, Guy kissed him again. He reached into his pocket, pulling out a familiar vial and shaking it with a little smile.

"So...I guess you thought you'd be fucking me tonight?"

Guy laughed. "Actually I always carry this. Take off these pants and go lie on the bed."

Riki obeyed, lying back on the bed and waiting for Guy, who undressed quickly, his eyes shining.

"Let me turn on a light, Riki," he pleaded. "I can barely see you."

"No."

Now Guy climbed onto the bed, lying on top of him. "Why not? What are you trying to hide?"

"I just...prefer it that way. It's my prerogative."

"Your...?" Guy laughed a little. "Whatever." He began kissing Riki again, taking hold of his hand and pouring oil into it, then guiding it to his erection. Riki could not help but be reminded of Iason, who used to do the same thing, only a little slower, with a sort of gentle insistence that Riki had grown to love.

Guy lifted his hips a little as Riki fondled him. Lubricating a finger, he inserted it, wiggling it a bit in a way the mongrel remembered well.

"That's it," Guy whispered, closing his eyes as Riki stroked him. "Yeah, Riki. That's nice. Just like that."

Riki sighed, suddenly wishing, despite himself, that he was loving Iason. He could not help but wonder what his Blondie Master was doing...and then he began to imagine Iason with Enyu, and he suddenly felt annoyed with himself for suggesting that Iason take the Xeronian. He had no doubt that Iason would act on his offer; the Blondie required release every day, without fail, at least once and often several times. While thinking about this he unconsciously began pumping Guy a little harder.

"Whoa," Guy whispered, reaching down to pull Riki's hand off with a little laugh. "That's good." With that, he guided himself up to Riki's portal. "Spread your legs more....I can't..."

Riki obeyed, opening himself up to his old lover, who slowly entered him, groaning.

"Oh yeah. Riki. You're...you feel fucking amazing."

Silent, Riki closed his eyes, noticing the difference between Guy and Iason. Guy was much smaller than Iason, and yet...despite Iason's enormous girth, he found that he actually preferred the way the Blondie felt inside him. He missed Iason. He missed...his exotic, indescribable scent, his long, impossibly beautiful hair....

Guy was beside himself with pleasure. "God I've missed this. Riki...you're...perfect."

Riki put his hands around Guy's back, sliding them down to his ass, where he felt the unmistakable marks of discipline.

"Oh," Guy gasped. "That...hurts a bit."

"I thought so. You were limping a little tonight."

"I was?" Guy asked, mortified, slowing his thrusting.

"Don't worry. I doubt anyone else noticed."

Guy fell silent, and suddenly it became clear to both of them that he had lost his erection and fallen out.

"Oh fuck," he whispered.

“It’s all right,” Riki comforted.

Now Guy rolled over onto his back, covering his face with his arm. “Fuck. Fuck!”

Riki turned on his side, rising up on his elbow. “Hey. It’s no...big deal.”

“I didn’t...want you to know about it.”

“Has he done it before?”

“No. Just...last night.”

“Look. That shit happens...all the time. You’d be surprised.”

“Right. Has it ever happened to you?” Guy demanded.

Now Riki smiled. If only Guy knew. “Yeah,” he said softly.

“You’re lying. You’re just saying that...to make me feel less worthless.”

“Honest. I’ve had...my ass whipped plenty of times.”

Guy sighed, not really believing him but appreciating his attempts to make him feel better. “This wasn’t how I imagined it would be. Fuck.”

“We were going good for awhile there. And...the night’s still young, so?”

Braving a look at him, Guy smiled. “Yeah. You’re still sweet as ever, Riki. Come here.” He held out his arms and Riki snuggled in, closing his eyes.

“I think I’ve missed this...most of all,” he sighed.

“Yeah,” Guy agreed.

They lay together for a long time, both of them feeling so comfortable that they fell asleep.

Guy was the first to wake up, surprised that it was already morning. Smiling, he turned to look at Riki, who was rolled over on his side, sleeping. He took advantage of the moment to examine Riki’s body, his eyes immediately gravitating to a strange mark on his lower back, just above his buttocks. He leaned closer, puzzled.

I.M.

Shaking his head, Guy wondered a little about this, but then was immediately distracted by Riki’s backside. Although the marks were faded, Guy could clearly see evidence that Riki had been

recently punished. And...his back. Stunned, Guy reached forward, touching his lover's skin, as if unable to believe what he saw. Were those...faded whipmarks?

Riki stirred, rolling onto his back and opening his eyes. Looking a little surprised to see Guy, he smiled, yawning. "Morning."

Guy returned the smile. "Sleep good?"

"Yeah."

"Me too. But I could really use some coffee."

Riki grinned. "Watch this." He pressed the coffee button by the bed, and immediately sounds emanated from the kitchen and the unmistakable aroma of coffee began filling the air.

When the coffeobot finally came rolling into the room, Guy laughed, loudly. "What the fuck?"

"Wait! It's fucking awesome!"

The coffeobot rolled up by the bed, his top sliding open to reveal a fresh pot of coffee and two mugs.

"Holy shit," Guy laughed.

"Hey! There's two mugs!" Riki exclaimed, excited. "How the hell did he figure that out?"

"You...how did you get all this, Riki?"

"This?"

Guy gestured to the penthouse. "This. Everything. You've obviously made a fortune somehow."

"That's my...little secret," Riki answered, with a mysterious smile.

Guy sighed. "You can't even tell me?"

"Nope." Riki grinned, pouring himself some coffee.

"What does I.M. mean?"

At this, Riki froze.

"Yeah. I saw it. And I also saw the marks on your backside."

Now Riki recovered, putting on a relaxed face. "Yeah, well. I've gotten into the whole discipline scene."

Guy narrowed his eyes, but said nothing.

"My...partner, he likes that sort of thing," Riki added.

“And who is your partner, Riki?”

“You wouldn't know him.”

“You can't at least tell me his name?”

“What, and let you go beat him up?”

Guy smiled. “What makes you think I care about you enough to do that?”

“You know you do,” Riki grinned.

Now Guy laughed, punching him in the arm. “You little shit. So...what does I.M. mean?”

“Ah, yes. It stands for Iotung Master. I learned how to play Iotung and it turns out I'm just about the best there is.”

“Oh.” Now Guy shook his head. “And you were actually so proud of that you had it tattooed to your ass?”

“I was a little drunk at the time.”

“I thought so,” Guy grinned. “You haven't changed all that much after all.”

Now Riki lit up, taking a deep drag. He offered Guy a smoke and for a while they sat in silence, smoking and drinking coffee.

“Riki. About last night,” Guy began.

“Forget about it. It doesn't matter.”

“Maybe we can try again, later today?”

“Sure.”

“Kei's going to be fucking pissed as hell. He'll probably come after you.”

Riki shrugged. “I can take him. So...are you breaking things off with him, then?”

“I don't know. He's actually...usually he's pretty cool. He just sorta...flipped out when you showed up.”

“Don't let me get in the way. I'm only going to be here for--”
Now Riki suddenly stopped, catching himself.

“You're only going to be here for...what?”

Riki shook his head, avoiding eye contact.

“When are you leaving, Riki?”

Sighing, Riki lifted his head and looked at Guy directly. “I'm going back in a few days.”

At this, Guy slammed his coffee cup down on the bedside table, spilling it. "What? A few fucking days? Why, Riki?"

"It just...has to be that way."

Frustrated, Guy put out his smoke, and sat with his head in his hands. "Why won't you talk to me?"

Riki remained silent, finishing his smoke. "I'm gonna shower," he said, softly, rising.

Guy grabbed his hand and Riki hesitated for a moment. "You can trust me, Riki. Whatever it is. I'll always be...here for you."

Riki pulled his hand away, gently, and walked away without replying. He made for the shower, his heart pounding. He wanted to tell Guy everything, but he couldn't. He knew that, for all Guy's promises, he wouldn't understand if he knew the truth.

He got into the shower, steam filling the room as he just stood, letting the water hit his body. Suddenly he remembered a time that Jason had come into the shower with him, and the mere thought of the beautiful Blondie aroused him immensely, quickly gifting him with a full erection. As he fondled himself, he heard the door slide open and turned to see Guy standing there.

"Still masturbating in the shower, I see," he said, moving toward him with a little smile.

Unable to reply, Riki only gasped as Guy pushed him up against the tile wall, taking hold of him and stroking him with experienced fingers as he kissed him, urgently.

"Now...let's try this again," Guy whispered, flipping him over to face the wall and pulling back a bit on his hips as he spread Riki's legs with his knees. Penetrating slowly, he continued fondling Riki, who began to cry out openly.

"You're about ready to burst. How does this feel?" Guy began thrusting a little harder, at the same time pumping him.

"Yeah. That's good," Riki gasped.

Guy groaned. "You feel so fucking good."

"Oh! I'm gonna come."

"Come, my love," Guy whispered in his ear.

Although Riki didn't care for the appellation "my love," he was too far gone to care. With a long moan, he ejaculated hard, his essence dripping down Guy's warm hand. Guy continued to pump him a bit more, then released him slowly, sliding his hands to Riki's hips as he increased the cadence of his fuck.

"God I've missed this," he groaned. "Fuck, you feel so perfect. Stay just like this."

Riki put his hands up against the tile, still recovering from his orgasm.

"Riki. God. Oh Riki. Yeah...I'm coming," Guy gasped, then his whole body began shaking in the distinctive way Riki remembered well as he released. Shuddering, Guy pulled out. "Oh fuck...that was brilliant." Guy wrapped his arms around Riki, resting his head on his shoulder.

For a long time they stood thus in the shower, reflecting on what had just transpired.

* * *

Iason stood on the west balcony, staring out at Tanagura. Night was falling and the lights of the city began to come on, one by one, just as the stars began to appear in the sky.

He was thinking of Riki, and his heart was heavy. In his thoughts he felt he could almost see his pet with someone else; for some reason, the image was quite specific--he saw Riki in the shower, a handsome youth with long dark hair taking him up against the shower wall.

He tried to dispel the image from his mind but found that he couldn't. It was a scene that had replayed over and over in his mind all day. Sighing, he once again berated himself for allowing his pet a week of freedom in Midas. He was certain of one thing--he would never do so again.

"Iason."

The Blondie turned to see Katze, who had come out to smoke and deliver a message to him.

“Omaki Ghan is here.”

Iason nodded, turning to go inside. “How is Daryl?”

“Good. He's starting to complain about having to stay in bed.”

Iason smiled. “That's a good sign. Well, why don't you bring him out here for a bit?”

Katze grinned. “He'd like that. Iason...could we use the pools?”

“Of course. Anytime, Katze.”

The Blondie quickly made his way back to the great hall, where Omaki was waiting. Aki was standing before the dragon prow in the corner of the room.

“Don't touch that, Aki,” Omaki warned.

“I'm not.”

“Omaki.” Iason nodded.

“Iason. I got your message. You...spoke to Jupiter, then?”

“Yes.” He turned to Juthian, who was standing quietly by the wall. “Juthian, could you take Aki somewhere...up to the Observatory, perhaps?”

“I wanna feed the fish!” Aki yelled.

“Aki,” Omaki chided. “Quiet down.”

“Can I feed the fish?” he whispered

“The fish have already been fed today,” Iason replied. “But you may go and see them.”

“But they might be hungry anyway!”

“No, Aki. That's enough,” Omaki said, a little sternly.

“You're mean,” Aki pouted, then realized his error.

Omaki leaned down and grabbed hold of his arm. “You want another spanking today, Aki, is that it?”

“No,” Aki replied, his eyes wide.

“Then behave and mind me.”

“Yes Master,” he said, though continued to sulk.

“Come with me, Aki,” Juthian said, holding out his hand.

Aki took his hand and they left the great hall, heading down the corridor. “Can I catch a butterfly?” he yelled.

“So. What did Jupiter say?” Omaki asked, nervously.

“She's giving you one month to make arrangements for him. And, she's giving you the option of appointing a Guardian.”

Clearly disappointed, Omaki fell silent.

“What did you expect Jupiter would say?”

Omaki shook his head. “I don't know. But I...don't want to give him up.”

“Appoint a good friend as a Guardian, someone who you can visit regularly.”

“It's not the same.”

“It's better than not seeing him at all for four years.”

Omaki sighed. “My best friend is now a complete idiot.”

“Yousi? No...find someone else.”

Now Omaki regarded Iason for a long moment. “Iason, would you--”

“No. Absolutely not.”

“But...he's a good boy, for the most part.”

“The last thing I need is another wild boy running around the penthouse.”

“Please, Iason. Eos is safe. I'd feel so much better if he were here with you.”

“No, Omaki,” Iason replied, annoyed.

“But...I know you like him. You like children. Everyone knows that. You...built that entire Children's Wing at Tanagura Medical.”

Iason made a face at this, turning away.

“You wouldn't have to do anything. Have Juthian take care of him.”

Iason sighed, bringing a hand to his head as he felt another headache coming on.

“Iason. I'm begging you.”

“Let me...let me think about it,” he sighed.

Satisfied, Omaki smiled. “So...what did Jupiter want to talk to you about?”

“She's letting me keep Riki...for another year. I'm to relocate the Xeronian.”

At this, Enyu, who had been watching the conversation with interest, startled. Iason wasn't going to be his Master anymore? He moved, his chains drawing both Blondies' attention.

"Does this mean you're selling him?" Omaki asked, his eyes widening.

Now Iason regarded him for a moment. "Are you interested?"

Omaki grinned. "You could say...that I am most definitely interested." He turned to look at Enyu, who rewarded him with a seductive smile. "Oh my. Yes. Iason. Name your price."

"He was a gift. So...you may have him, as a gift."

"Truly?" Omaki regarded Enyu with open lust, adjusting himself when the Xeronian responded by opening his robe and fondling himself.

"You'll have to be careful with Aki, though," Iason cautioned.

Omaki laughed. "I think he learned his lesson today. You'll notice he didn't even go near him."

Iason smiled. "That was quite a spanking."

"Oh yes...it was quite perfect. I rather...nearly stained my pants."

The Blondie shook his head at this, opting not to respond, although he knew perfectly well what Omaki meant.

"How much longer is his interval?"

Enyu perked up at this, pleased that Omaki used the proper terminology.

"Tomorrow is his last day."

"Ah. Then, perhaps I could take him home with me tonight?"

"Of course. But...I will have to send his clothes to you...we had not yet gone to the tailor."

Omaki shook his head. "No, no. I'll take care of all that. I have a few things in mind, already," he added, eyeing Enyu with a suggestive grin.

Enyu responded to this by spreading his legs wider and pumping himself harder.

"Oh my," Omaki breathed, adjusting himself again. "Iason, I may have to trouble you for...a cloth of some kind."

“Go ahead and take him now, if you want.”

“Now? I couldn't, honestly,” Omaki said, immediately walking toward Enyu. “However, if you insist.”

Enyu looked up at him hopefully.

“Hello, my Enyu,” he whispered, in Xeronian.

“You speak my tongue?” Enyu answered, surprised.

“Not well, mind you. Just the basics--the critically important things. Would you be so kind as to suck me off?” he said, unzipping his trousers to reveal a massive erection.

Enyu immediately got on his knees, obliging him, his tongue flicking across his head to collect his pre-ejaculatory essence.

“Exactly so,” Omaki said, grabbing hold of his head. “But let's speed things up a bit, I'm about to lose my seed. This is going to be just a quickie, mind you.”

The Xeronian opened wide and Omaki plunged inside, his eyes rolling back. “Ah yes. Absolutely delightful. Now prepare yourself for a special package here...which should be arriving...uhh...about now.” With that, the Blondie ejaculated, thrilled when Enyu swallowed every drop.

“Oh...you're a perfect little thing, aren't you? You're coming home with me tonight. What do you think about that?”

“Are you my new master?” Enyu asked, excited.

“Mmm, yes. But...touch Aki and I'll have to break your legs.”

Enyu shook his head. “I'll try not to. But...during my interval...I can't...help myself.”

Omaki nodded, zipping his pants. “I'll keep you chained up then.” He watched Enyu for a moment, feeling compassion for the Xeronian who pumped himself so pathetically. Crouching down, he reached out and took hold of his erection, smiling. “Let me help you out with that.”

“Ohh!” Enyu cried. “You're a good master!”

“You and I...are going to get along...quite well,” Omaki replied, smiling.

With just a few quick strokes, he brought the lusty Xeronian to orgasm, a little surprised by the copious amount of semen that shot across the floor. "My my," he commented.

Enyu was in the throes of his coital bliss, his head thrown back.

"You're a lovely little thing, aren't you?" Omaki whispered. "I'm going to take good care of you."

Gasping, Enyu looked at his new master, his eyes dilating and constricting. "I'll be good to you, Master. I'll do...whatever you say."

"Oh my. You're after my heart as well," Omaki replied, standing up. He turned to Iason, who had watched the whole scene with unveiled delight.

"That was quite a performance."

"You pervert," Omaki accused, smiling.

"I'm feeling rather pleased with this arrangement," Iason replied. "Although...a part of me will be sorry to see him go."

"You can come and visit him whenever you like," Omaki offered.

Iason turned to Enyu. "Omaki will be your master now. You were a good little pet, Enyu. I am sorry that I did not take better care of you."

"Master Iason took good care of me," Enyu protested, then turned to Omaki, smiling. "But I am happy to go with Master Omaki."

"You'll consider my request, then?" Omaki said, turning back to Iason.

"I'll consider it. No promises, Omaki."

Omaki nodded. "Very well. Then...let me retrieve my Aki, and we'll be off."

Iason's Sorrow

Omaki chained Enyu firmly to the hall post while Aki ran around in a wide circle, excited. He had been in a state of rapture since learning that the “naked man” was coming home with them, and had spent the entire trip home straining to look behind him to the back seat to see what Enyu was up to.

“He's touching his private parts again,” Aki repeatedly announced.

“Yes, Aki. I heard you the first time.”

“But why is he doing that?”

“Because, it makes him feel good.”

Aki pondered this for a moment, reaching down to touch himself.

Omaki smiled at this, then took hold of his hand and directed it back to his side. “That's not appropriate for little boys, Aki.”

“How come?” Aki demanded.

“Because...I said so. That's something private.”

“Then can I touch myself in private?”

“That is up to you.”

“Huh?” Aki looked at him, confused.

Omaki smiled. “Yes, you may do so in private.”

“But,” Aki said after a moment, “do I have to tell you if I do?”

“Only if you choose to,” Omaki replied, suddenly forced to adjust himself.

Aki narrowed his eyes. “Then how come YOU get to touch yourself and HE gets to be naked and touch himself?”

“Because we are grown men, not little boys.”

The boy reflected on this for a moment. Enyu, who had been vigorously masturbating in the back seat, at that moment ejaculated, groaning loudly as semen squirted up and then ran down his hand.

Aki screamed.

"Hush," Omaki chided.

"He broke it!"

Now Omaki tried hard not to laugh, but found that he could not suppress a smile. "It is not broken, Aki. That is how grown men relieve themselves."

"But...he said he didn't have to use the bathroom."

"I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about something else that you're too young to understand."

Aki regarded Enyu with a mixture of horror and awe. "What's all that...stuff on his hand?"

"A special present," Enyu replied. "Do you wanna lick my hand, Aki?"

"Enyu," Omaki scolded, sharply.

"Can I lick his hand?" Aki pleaded.

"Absolutely not."

"I am sorry, Master," Enyu said, softly, bowing his head.

"It is all right, Enyu. But you are not to solicit Aki's sex again. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Master."

"What does solicit my sex mean?"

"Never mind, Aki."

"Hmm," Aki pouted.

Now that they were home, Aki was unable to contain his excitement over Enyu's arrival and continued to run in a wide circle until finally Omaki grabbed him and sat him down firmly in a chair. "Settle down," he ordered.

"I can't," Aki whimpered.

"I suggest you try, Aki, or I'll turn you over my knee and give you a good hard spanking. That will force you to settle down, I think."

Aki quieted at this, watching Enyu get comfortable in a chair that Omaki pushed within the reach of his chain. The Xeronian was thrilled to be treated as something more than an animal, and began to purr, a strangely erotic sound that fascinated his new master.

"Oh my," he whispered. "I like that." He leaned forward to whisper in Enyu's ear. "You and I will get to know one another more intimately later tonight, after Aki's gone to bed."

Enyu smiled at this, blinking his elliptically dilated eyes hypnotically. Omaki could not resist reaching out to put a hand in his hair. "You're a good little pet, Enyu."

"What did you whisper in his ear?" Aki asked, loudly.

"That is my own business," Omaki replied. Then he pointed to a line that he had taped on the floor, marking the perimeter of Enyu's reach. "Now, Aki. You are NOT to cross this line, ever. Is that understood?"

"Yeah." Aki looked away, uninterested.

Omaki walked over to him and crouched down before him. "Aki. Listen to me. If you do not mind me, I will spank you twice as hard and three times as long as I did earlier today. Your bottom will hurt so horribly you won't be able to sit. Is that perfectly clear?"

Eyes wide, Aki nodded.

"Good boy. Now, go and get ready for bed."

"But I'm not sleepy!"

"That makes no difference. Mind me, Aki."

Trudging off to his room as though he were being sent into combat unarmed, Aki muttered to himself about the injustice of being a little boy. Omaki started to pet Enyu, but was redirected to his terminal when a call came in from Heiku.

"I'm sorry to disturb you so late," Heiku began.

"Not a problem," Omaki replied, smiling. "How are things over at Tanagura Medical?"

"Quite...interesting, actually. That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Oh?" Now Omaki grinned. "Sounds like you've got some juicy gossip you're anxious to disperse."

Heiku laughed. "Yes, actually. Who do you suppose came to me today?"

"I couldn't possible guess."

"Raoul Am."

"Raoul?" Omaki was puzzled at this, and then laughed. "Let me guess. He came to you to remove a branding mark?"

"A...branding mark? No," Heiku answered, smiling. "Though now you've piqued my curiosity on that count."

"Oh, I can't tell you about that. No indeed. You'll have to wait until I can show you the footage. It's quite...remarkable."

"Sounds delightful. But no, it wasn't to remove a branding mark. Give up?"

"I'm afraid so."

Now Heiku leaned forward. "He wants to have his Furniture go through reconstruction."

Omaki fell silent for a moment. "Is this an independent channel, Heiku?"

"Let's see...yes, it is."

"Are you certain?"

"Yes. As long as they are available, I always use Independent."

Omaki relaxed. "Then...you're saying?"

"I don't know for certain, but my guess is that Raoul is taking the youth--his name is Yui, I believe."

"Is that so?" Omaki shook his head. "I would not have expected that from Raoul."

Heiku smiled. "Why not? Everyone knows he and Iason paired for years."

"Still, to take his own Furniture? I find it surprising."

"Oh, I find it shocking," Heiku grinned. "Especially that he has the balls to defy Jupiter and undo a sanctioned modification."

"Yes, well...my opinion of Raoul just went up a few notches."

"Mine as well."

"So, are you going to do it? The procedure?"

"I'm considering it."

"You realize what the punishment is if you're caught?"

Heiku nodded. "Confiscation of my assets and a public whipping."

"And you're...willing to risk that?"

"In the name of freedom, yes."

"I take it you've never actually BEEN to a public whipping," Omaki replied, grinning.

"Omaki. You're incorrigible."

"Yes, well." At this moment, Omaki turned and saw that Aki was about to step past the line he had so carefully delineated. "I must go, Heiku," he said, abruptly cutting off the transmission.

"Aki!" he yelled.

Aki's foot was just past the line, and Enyu was ready to pounce. Aki started, pulling his foot back.

"What did I tell you, Aki?" he scolded.

"But he--"

"What did I just tell you? Didn't I make it perfectly clear to you what would happen if you disobeyed me?"

At this Aki began to cry.

"Come here!"

The boy remained frozen, now terrified. Omaki took a few steps forward and lifted him up, carrying him over to his chair. He sat down, pulling him over his knees and tugging down his pajama bottoms.

"You're going to be punished, Aki. I warned you, but you didn't listen, did you? I'm going to teach you to mind me. Two spankings in the same day. What a naughty boy!"

Aki clutched onto Omaki's pants, already wailing. Omaki gave him a good, hard spanking, reprimanding him all the while. At length he brought matters to a close, partially out of pity for the boy who cried so pathetically, and partly because spanking Aki had given him an onerous erection. He set Aki roughly on his feet. "Now go to your room until I call you," he said, giving his bare bottom one final pat. Aki ran to his room, not even bothering to pull up his bottoms, holding his reddened bottom and sobbing as he ran, his pajama bottoms trailing around his ankles.

Omaki immediately fumbled with his trousers and then found that his zipper was stuck. He cursed, his hands shaking. He was so aroused he was ready to burst.

"Can I help you, Master?" Enyu asked, having watched the entire spanking with delight, fondling himself as he watched. He could sense his Master's arousal right away and this excited him even more.

"Too late," Omaki gasped, finally freeing himself and then, with a loud groan, pumping himself, the semen oozing down his hand with delicious release. He let his head fall back against the chair, closing his eyes.

"Master likes spanking Aki," Enyu noted.

Now Omaki opened one eye, looking over at Enyu with a saucy grin tugging at his lips. "You're quite perceptive," he teased. "I wonder...what gave you that idea."

Enyu grinned. "I liked watching you."

"Ohh," Omaki laughed, brokenly. "I adore you already."

"Are we still going to...get to know one another intimately tonight?" Enyu asked, hopefully.

Omaki smiled. "Is that how I put it? Why yes. If you mean, am I going to fuck you hard, little pet, the answer is yes." He gestured to his pelvis. "Don't let this concern you. I'm good for at least three times a day."

Excited, Enyu got up, moving the complete reach of his chain toward him, straining.

"Settle down now. Not yet. I have...a little matter to attend to."

With that, Omaki cleaned up. He could hear Aki continue to sob and his heart softened a little.

"Aki," he called, finally.

The sobbing ceased and a dead silence followed.

"Come here."

After a long moment, Aki peeped his head out from around the corner, eyes wide, cheeks tear-stained, as he sucked his thumb.

"Come now. You're far too old to be sucking your thumb, Aki."

Aki removed his thumb reluctantly.

“Come here,” Omaki repeated, patting his lap reassuringly.

At this, the boy relaxed, slowly walking towards him until he reached his chair, then climbed up onto his lap. Omaki put his arms around him, pulling him close.

With a big sigh, Aki leaned his head against his Master's chest, snuggling up to him.

Omaki began stroking his hair. “You know that I punish you for good reasons, Aki. I am trying to keep you safe. Sometimes you don't understand why I tell you not to do something. You will have to learn to trust me and obey me, for your own good.”

“My bottom hurts,” Aki whimpered, wiggling to lie more on his outer thigh.

“Yes, I imagine it does, because you've just been spanked soundly twice in the same day. If you are good and mind me, you won't have that problem. Isn't that right?”

Aki sighed again.

“Now, are you going to go near Enyu, Aki?”

“No.”

“Why did you go near him this time, after I had just told you not to?”

“Because he said he had a special present for me and that you said I could.”

“You must never listen to what he tells you, because what he is trying to do is get you to disobey me so he can...grab you,” Omaki said, giving Enyu a warning look. Enyu hunched down a bit. “He will try to trick you, so obey me, Aki.”

“But why does he want to grab me?”

“Because...he likes little boys and he wants to,” now Omaki paused, trying to think how to explain matters.

“He grabbed me before and pulled down my pants!”

“Yes. Exactly. That's what he wants to do.”

“But why does he want to do that?”

“Because, Aki,” Omaki said, sighing, “he wants to...put himself inside you.”

“Huh?” Aki looked up at him, bewildered.

“He wants to...put his private parts in your special place.”

“What?” Aki yelled, horrified. “Why does he want to do that?”

“Because that is what grown men like to do.”

“Why...would they want to do that?” Aki repeated again, mystified.

“When you are a little older you will understand. But...grown men like to put their private parts in...tight places.”

Aki thought about this for a moment. “Then...why can't he just use that little toy you have in your room?”

“Aki. Don't tell me you've been peeking in my room?”

Realizing his error, Aki began to cry again.

“Now, now. I'm not going to spank you again. But no more nosing around in my room, Aki. That's off limits. Understood?”

“Yeah,” Aki sniffed.

“Good boy.” Omaki stroked his hair reassuringly, kissing the top of his head.

“I love you, Master,” Aki whispered, yawning.

His heart stopping, Omaki could not reply for a moment. It was the first time Aki had ever expressed such a sentiment.

“I love you too, Aki,” he said softly, finally. “You're a sweet little boy.”

Aki made a little noise, and Omaki looked down to see that he had closed his eyes. Smiling, he held the boy a while longer until it was clear he had fallen asleep. Then he gently carried him to his room and tucked him into bed.

He returned to hall and stood before Enyu, one hand on his hip. “It seems you're in for some punishment, naughty pet,” he said, smiling.

Enyu backed away, looking frightened and dismayed. Omaki took hold of his neck chain, pulling him closer. “I shall have to fuck you repeatedly until I feel your punishment is sufficient.”

At this, Enyu relaxed, smiling. “Yes, Master. I must be punished. Punish me hard.”

“Oh, I shall. But, in all seriousness, Enyu, you must try to rein in your desires when it comes to Aki.”

“I cannot help it,” Enyu pleaded, miserably.

Omaki studied him for a moment. “Yes, I believe that. Poor thing. Well, then I fear my Aki is going to have a perpetually sore little bottom, unless I can teach him to mind me.”

“When my interval is past, I will behave, I promise.”

“And...are you still easily aroused when you are not in your interval?”

“Oh yes,” Enyu replied, excited. “The only difference is that I can control myself.”

Omaki smiled at this. “Excellent. Because you see, I have rather significant daily needs.”

Yes, Master,” Enyu smiled, happily. “I will take care of you.”

“I mean at least three times a day, perhaps five. Or six.”

Enyu's eyes dilated at this and he immediately reached for himself, fondling his erection. “Oh, Master,” he breathed. “I will do whatever you wish.”

“Good boy. Now, my Enyu, it's time for a good fucking.” With that, he released his chain from the hall post and led him into the master bedroom, where he had Enyu disrobe.

“Let me take a look at you. Turn around.”

Enyu obeyed, and Omaki winced upon seeing the dark bruises on his buttocks and thighs from his taming. “Oh my. Iason is brutal with that taming stick, isn't he?”

Enyu whimpered a little at this, but made no reply, afraid to say anything against an Elite.

“Even so...my, you are lovely. Spread your legs and bend over with your hands on the bed.”

The Xeronian did as instructed, offering himself for Omaki's viewing pleasure. The Blondie unfastened his trousers and began coddling his new erection. “Arch your back,” he whispered, then drew in his breath sharply when Enyu obeyed. “Oh my. Yes.”

“Master,” Enyu whispered, excited. “I wanna be fucked. Please fuck me.”

These words sent a renewed surge of carnal excitement to the Blondie's loins, and he quickly undressed to honor his pet's request.

The Xeronian looked back at him, eyes widening at the handsome Blondie's impressive physique, which was far more alluring than he had expected, his abdomen ripped tight and his long limbs beautifully sculpted.

"Master...I love your body," he announced, excited.

"And I love yours," Omaki replied, positioning himself behind his new pet, his eyes now dark and smoldering with lust. He rested his hands on Enyu's hips, teasing him for a few minutes by pressing his massive erection up to his portal without actually penetrating.

Enyu began panting, arching back against him in an attempt to force penetration. "Fuck me. Please. Fuck me, Master."

Grinning at his pet's solicitation, the Blondie finally complied with his pet's wishes, sinking his immense organ into the Xeronian's astonishingly tight depths.

"Oh...Enyu," he groaned, his eyes rolling back.

Enyu cried out loudly from the pain of penetration, but was so aroused that within just a few minutes his cries changed to whimpers of pleasure. He bucked back against his Master, inviting deeper knowledge, and Omaki responded to this by undertaking further exploration, much to the complete satisfaction of both master and pet.

"You're so...fucking tight," Omaki said, his voice low and raspy with sex.

"Mmmnn," Enyu groaned, reaching up to pump himself as he felt his ascent suddenly approach. "Oh Master...sooo good!"

"Come for me, my pet," the Blondie commanded, fucking him a little harder.

Enyu obeyed, his semen shooting across the bed in glorious arcs, his cries so spine-tingling that they elicited coital release from his Master, who dug his nails into his pet's hips as he ejaculated into his anal embrace.

"Jupiter help me," he gasped, feeling a bit overcome from the experience. He withdrew, slowly, groaning as a few truant spasms of pleasure titillated him. "Oh...Enyu...you are...a complete delight."

Enyu was shaking, having had such an immensely satisfying orgasm that he was rendered momentarily speechless.

“Was it...not pleasurable for you?” Omaki asked, concerned when his pet did not reply.

“Oh...Master. That was...my best sexual experience ever,” Enyu replied, honestly.

Smiling, Omaki turned his pet around and then bent down, gifting him with a gentle kiss. He explored him a little with his tongue, and then pulled away, shivering.

“Oh my. We'll have to...try this again later,” he whispered. “I like kissing you.”

“I like...to be kissed,” Enyu replied, feeling rather swept off his feet by his new, incredibly erotic Master.

“So. Perhaps now we should take care of your needs. We'll get you some dinner and then you can take a nice long bath.”

“Thank you, Master,” Enyu answered, grinning. At that moment, he felt the happiest he had ever felt in his life.

* * *

Iason spent every night that week in Riki's room, where he sat, thinking about his pet. Sometimes he ran the holographic projector, but mostly he only needed his own thoughts to fuel his fantasies.

This night he was particularly excited. Tomorrow his pet would be coming home, and he could hardly wait. He unfastened his trousers and released himself as he sat in his favorite chair there, spreading his legs a bit as he began stroking himself.

Just the mere thought of Riki gave him an erection; to actively fantasize about his pet guaranteed consummation. He imagined his pet lying on the bed, his legs spread apart as he invited Iason's approach. The Blondie positioned his pet in a variety of poses, fucking him without restraint; in his fantasies he was prone to be a bit more violent than he was typically with his pet, somehow finding such forceful acquisition particularly erotic. He longed for deep penetration, groaning a bit as he imagined Riki face down, legs

together in Iason's favorite position, as the Blondie rode his prostrate pet, lifting his hips for a slightly more intimate fuck.

Then he thought about spanking Riki, and this he found exceedingly arousing; so much so that within minutes he began a precipitous ascent, hurling himself toward a glorious finish as his semen pumped up in hypnotic bursts, dripping slowly down his hand.

“Riki,” he groaned, letting his head fall back against the chair.

* * *

Riki pressed the coffee button again, curious to see what the coffeobot would do if he blocked its path. The little bot, after brewing up a pot of coffee, rolled toward the bedroom. Riki stepped in front of it, blocking its access. The bot hesitated, turning around in a little circle and then attempted to go around him before it was thwarted by Riki's foot.

“Quit teasing that thing,” Guy laughed, from the bed.

“Why? It's fun.”

“You'll screw up its programming. It'll explode or something.”

Riki grinned. “That would be fucking cool.”

“I kinda feel sorry for it, what with assholes like you tormenting it.”

Now Riki shook his fist. “Say that to my face, ya wise ass.”

“Come over here and I will,” Guy taunted, smiling.

Riki approached him and Guy reached out and grabbed him, throwing him over his knee and spanking him, hard.

“Oh! Fucking cut it out!” Riki giggled.

“No. You must be punished!”

“You suck as a disciplinarian,” Riki laughed. “That doesn't even hurt.”

“Oh?” Taking this as a challenge, Guy tugged down his pants, now spanking him quite a bit harder.

“Fuck! Okay! Ow, fuck! Yeah, I was just---kidding, uhn! Stop!”

“No! You're going to pay for those remarks, Sir Riki!”

Riki was laughing at the same time he was crying out, which resulted in a bad case of the hiccups.

Guy laughed. "You're really something."

Riki didn't reply, holding his breath in an attempt to remedy his little problem.

Now Guy began rubbing his ass, which was a little red from his spanking. "Mmmm. Now this is giving me ideas."

The mongrel expelled his breath. "Fucking forget it," he announced. "You already fucked me enough times, you little prick. Give me a break."

"Hmmm. I guess this means you need...ANOTHER SPANKING!" With that, Guy spanked him again, this time so hard that Riki was no longer amused.

"Dammit, Guy! Fucking cut it out!"

"No. This is for taking off for two years who knows where, without ever calling me or anything." Increasing the intensity of his strikes, Guy pinned Riki down, suddenly releasing all his pent-up anger regarding Riki's disappearance on his partner's bare ass.

"Guy! Please!"

"Hush, and take it like a man," Guy replied, feeling inexplicably angry, not even realizing that he was parroting back Kei's words to him.

Riki struggled fruitlessly to escape his punishment, feeling keenly the injustice of being punished during his week of vacation.

"Shit," he whimpered, his eyes stinging with tears.

"Do you have any fucking clue what I went through?" Guy demanded, continuing his brutal discipline.

Riki cried out, kicking wildly in his attempt to wriggle free.

"I fucking waited by the phone for months," Guy hissed.

"I'm sorry! Please! Fuck! Please, Guy!"

At that moment the coffee pot arrived by the bed, its lid sliding open to reveal a fresh pot of coffee and two mugs. Momentarily distracted, Guy lost his hold on Riki, who immediately broke free.

"You fucking asshole!" Riki yelled, taking a swing at him.

Guy ducked, but too late; Riki's fist met with his cheek in a stunning blow that left him reeling. Riki continued to swing at him, and Guy tried to defend himself, grabbing onto his wrists and finally managing to flip him onto his back, pinning him down to the bed.

"All right, Riki. Let's call it even," he gasped, tasting blood in his mouth.

Riki slowly began to calm down. "Yeah, okay," he said, finally.

Guy released him. "Shit. It wasn't like I was even spanking you that hard."

"It felt plenty hard to me," Riki snapped back, grumpily, pulling his pants back up and zipping them.

"And you said I wasn't a disciplinarian," Guy taunted, grinning.

"Shut up, ya fucking bastard." Riki lit up a smoke, then poured himself some coffee.

"Give me one of those," Guy demanded.

Riki tossed him a smoke, sulking.

"Oh, come on. Let's not ruin things."

"Did it ever occur to you...that maybe I wasn't able to contact you?" Riki replied, darkly.

Guy tilted his head, pondering this. "What do you mean?"

Now Riki looked away, sighing. "Nothing. Forget it."

Guy studied him for a long moment. "Hey. I'm...sorry. I just...it's just that I've been carrying all this around...for a long time."

The mongrel shrugged, taking a deep drag. "Whatever."

"Geez, Riki. It's not like you to get so worked up over something like this. It was just a little spanking, for crying out loud."

"I'm a grown man," Riki shouted. "You don't spank a grown man!"

Guy raised his hands in a gesture of surrender. "Sure, okay. Damn. Sorry."

"I need to get out of here. Let's...go somewhere."

“We can probably go back to Depravities now. It's been five days. No one will care.”

“Yeah.” Riki thought about telling Guy he only had until sundown, but decided that he would just disappear when it was time.

“Although...Kei's probably camped there, waiting for us.”

“Fuck Kei. I'm not scared of that little weasel.”

“Good. Then...let's go.”

Riki started to get up and Guy grabbed his wrist. “Give me a kiss first,” he demanded.

Riki bent down and kissed him, wondering if it would be their last kiss. Strangely, he found that he did not even really care. He missed Iason terribly and longed for a good long fucking session with the Blondie. Sex with Guy had been perfectly decent, but...it just wasn't the same. In every regard, Guy just couldn't measure up to Iason.

* * *

Raoul entered quietly, hoping to surprise Yui. He'd brought him a present, remembering how Yui had remarked, rather sadly, on how lonely he was when Raoul was away at work.

The aroma of the evening meal made his mouth water; Yui was an incredible cook, and Raoul was famished.

As he crept into the kitchen, Yui immediately sensed him, turning and gifting him with a heart-stopping grin. “Master!” he greeted him, delighted.

“Come here.”

Yui immediately obeyed, putting aside what he was working on. Raoul reached down and kissed him gently on the lips. “I have something for you.”

A tiny mew announced the nature of this “something” and Yui squealed with delight as Raoul pulled a tiny kitten out of his pocket.

“For me?” Yui accepted the fluffy present with utter delight, holding him carefully in his hands.

“You said you got lonely, so....”

Now Yui looked up at Raoul, his eyes shining with tears.
“Thank you, Master.”

“But you have to take care of it,” Raoul warned. “I have no patience with animals and don't know the first thing about taking care of them.”

“He won't,” Yui began, then stopped. “Is it a he?”

“I...don't know,” Raoul confessed.

They both examined the kitten for a moment.

“I still don't know,” Raoul said, confused.

“I think it's a boy,” Yui said, excited. “See?”

“Ah. Yes.”

“He won't be any trouble, Master, I promise!”

Now Raoul shook a finger at him. “See that he isn't, or I shall have to punish you.”

“Punish me?” Yui grinned.

“Yes. Turn you over my knee and give you a good hard spanking.”

The kitten mewed again, eliciting smiles from them both.

“Where...did you get him?”

“I found him. I was down by Tanagura Medical and he just wandered out from under a bush and sat at my feet, looking up at me. Then he started making...that little sound.”

The kitten mewed again, as if on cue.

Yui giggled.

“Yes. That one,” Raoul smiled.

“What were you doing at the hospital?” Yui asked, suddenly worried.

Raoul smiled at his transparent concern. “That's my second surprise for you. I can't guarantee it's going to work out, but I'm trying to make arrangements for you to undergo reconstruction.”

Stunned, Yui stared back at him, speechless.

“Would that please you?”

“I...don't know what to say. You mean...reverse modification?”

“Yes.”

“So...so that,” Yui fell silent, unable to articulate his thoughts.

Raoul slid his hands down Yui's side to his hips. “So that I can pleasure you, Yui.” He leaned closer, kissing his neck and then whispering in his ear. “I want to make you come.”

Shivering, Yui gasped a little, unconsciously squeezing the kitten a little too tight, eliciting a mew of complaint.

“Put it down,” Raoul commanded.

Yui put the kitten on the floor, and for a moment he simply sat there, legs wide apart, looking around. Then he began happily exploring.

Raoul prodded Yui's mouth open with his tongue, kissing him slowly, insistently. “I want you now, Yui.”

“Yes Master,” Yui whispered. “But...dinner?”

“Mmmm.” Now Raoul, hesitated, his stomach reminding him of his hunger. “That's true. Let's eat first. And then I'm taking you...again and again.”

As if to emphasize this, Raoul pulled him close, guiding his hand down to his erection so Yui could feel his arousal. He nibbled on the youth's neck, biting a little too hard in his enthusiasm.

Yui cried out.

“Did that hurt you? Oh...but...I'm going to take you hard tonight. Please forgive me.”

“I am yours...to do with as you please,” Yui gasped.

Raoul closed his eyes, sighing, as he pulled Yui close. “Oh, Yui. What are you doing to me?”

Yui blinked a few times, having no answer for this. He snuggled up to Raoul, enjoying their embrace.

* * *

When Riki and Guy arrived at Depravities, they found that Sid, Noris and Luke were already there. They joined them at their table; Guy put his arm around Riki as they sat down.

“Where have you two been hiding?” Noris demanded, grinning.

“We weren't hiding,” Riki protested.

Guy smiled. "Yeah. We were...busy."

The others smiled knowingly at this, glad to see the old pairing partners together again.

"It's just like the old gang again," Sid said, voicing what everyone was feeling.

Then Guy grew serious. "Has Kei been around?"

Luke nodded. "He comes by every day, looking for both of you."

"You really fucked him up, Riki," Noris said. "You should have seen his face the next day."

"You came back here the very next day?" Guy demanded.

Noris shrugged. "No one cared. I don't even think they called the police."

At that moment the attendant arrived, immediately greeting Riki.

"Sir Riki. What can I get you tonight?"

"A round of whatever they want."

"Brandy!" Sid and Noris both shouted.

Luke crossed his legs. "I'll have a cognac."

The others snorted at this, finding it especially amusing.

"Oh! Sir Luke is having the cognac," Noris announced in a lofty, elegant voice.

"I'll have...a brandy, too," Riki said. "What about you, Guy?"

"Brandy." Guy smiled.

"How about some more smokes, Riki?" Sid pleaded.

"And...five packs of Dark Baccalias."

"Woo hoo!" Sid cheered.

"Very good, Sir. I will be back directly."

"Thank Jupiter you're back, Sir Riki," Noris teased. "We haven't been able to get any fucking service."

"You missed it," Sid said. "There was a Blondie here earlier. He had a gorgeous little pet--a Xeronian!"

Riki felt the blood drain from his face. Had Iason come looking for him?

"Yeah, apparently it was the owner," Noris added. "He kept looking over here at our table, too."

Now Riki began to feel angry. Was it possible that Iason owned Depravities and had been watching him this whole time? And had he come here with Enyu to retrieve him?

“Hey. Riki. What's up?” Guy whispered.

Riki shook his head. “Nothing.”

In fact, in that moment the mongrel jumped to the wrong conclusion, assuming that Iason had not trusted him to come back on his own and had come to fetch him. Furious, he decided to punish Iason. He would not go back as he had promised. That would be his way of showing Iason that he still had a will of his own.

* * *

The sun was on the horizon. Everyone in the household was quiet, aware of Master Iason's distress.

Iason sat in his chair, brooding. Riki was late. If he did not return in the next few moments, he would know that his pet was deliberately defying him. He waited, anxiously, desperately hoping that the mongrel would suddenly arrive, apologizing for being tardy.

But Riki did not come.

Juthian, Katze, Daryl, Tai, and Odi all glanced at one another, aware of the magnitude of Riki's disobedience and the effect it was having on Iason.

The sun had set; Riki had not returned home.

For some moments, Iason simply continued to sit in his chair, feeling incredibly hurt. His heart felt as though it were breaking. His pet had chosen to stay away. Even though the Blondie knew he would be able to find Riki and bring him home, he was devastated that his pet had not returned voluntarily. His throat was tight; his eyes were stinging. It was almost more than he could bear that his pet did not love him the way he so desperately wanted.

Finally Katze approached him. “I'll go get him,” he said, softly.

“Don't force him, Katze. See if he'll come willingly. If not, I'll fetch him myself.”

Katze nodded, glancing over at Daryl, who raised his eyebrows at this. Everyone knew the mongrel would be in for it if his Master was forced to fetch him.

“He's at Depravities,” Iason said, handing him the tracer unit.

Katze took it and left, finding that he was actually quite angry with Riki for hurting Iason so tremendously. And he intended to let Riki know exactly what he thought of his latest transgression.

A Simple Misunderstanding

Now that the sun had set and Riki had officially missed his deadline to return to Eos, he began to feel a bit uneasy. He knew that his rebellion would have repercussions, and now he began to torture himself imagining what Iason would do when he failed to return.

Guy finally noticed his silence. "Hey. Riki. What's...up?"

Riki shrugged, trying to appear unconcerned. "Nothing. I'm just a bit tired."

"Yeah. And we know why," Noris grinned, eliciting laughter from everyone at the table.

Guy laughed softly, pulling Riki a little closer.

Riki smiled, but his lips felt tight, and he could feel that his palms were starting to sweat.

"Ya worried about Kei?" Sid asked.

"Fuck no," Riki snorted.

"I'm surprised he's not here," Guy said, thoughtfully.

"He's been busy. He's been getting orders like crazy," Noris remarked.

"Yeah. Apparently Katze has just disappeared off the scene," Luke added.

Riki made a little laugh at this. "He's trying to take on Katze? What a brainless ape."

Now everyone regarded him with curiosity. "And...what do you know about Katze, Riki?" Guy asked, finally.

"Everyone knows Katze runs the entire underground market. That's all I meant."

“Hmmm. But no one has seen him in over a week,” Luke commented.

“He's around.” Riki lit up a smoke, taking a deep drag.

Noris lit up, too, glancing at Luke. “Yeah. They say he's got connections with that Blondie who runs the Syndicate. What's his name. Iastar Fox?”

“Iason Mink,” Luke corrected, smiling.

“Yeah. That one.”

At the mere mention of Iason's name, Riki felt his blood run cold. He realized then that everyone was watching him carefully. He tried to shrug it off but suddenly felt paralyzed.

“Geez. Riki. You look like you're gonna be sick,” Guy whispered. Riki shook his head.

“Hmmm.” Noris and Luke exchanged looks.

“That doesn't mean anything,” Guy snapped. “Fucking leave him alone.”

Noris held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. “What? I didn't say anything.”

The mongrel watched his exchange, his heart sinking a bit. So. His gang had already heard rumors of his relationship with Iason. He had suspected as much; but this was the first time the subject had ever really come up.

“Fucking lies,” Guy muttered.

“Calm down, I was just fucking around,” Noris said, smiling.

“Yeah, everyone knows Riki would never....” Sid fell silent, suddenly distracted by the figure who stood before them.

It was Katze. He stood, with his arms across his chest, anger evident in his features.

Everyone stared at him in astonishment, except Riki, who kept his head bowed.

“Riki. I need to talk to you. NOW.”

The others now regarded Riki with surprise, trying to make sense of the intimacy obviously shared between the two. It was particularly astonishing given that they had just been discussing

Katze but a few moments before, and it was almost eerie that he had suddenly shown up.

Riki put out his smoke, then got up. "I'll be back in a few minutes," he said.

As he moved away from the table, he could hear his gang whispering excitedly, and Guy's voice rising above the others, sounding angry.

Katze put his hand on Riki's back, practically pushing him out the door. Once they were outside, they moved off to a deserted spot in the alley next to the building where Katze's car was parked.

"What the fuck are you doing?" Katze demanded, hands on hips.

Riki shrugged.

"You were supposed to be back before sundown."

"I'm not going back."

"You little shit. You're an ungrateful fucking little spoiled brat."

"Whatever."

"You're coming with me."

"No, I'm not."

Katze answered this with a hard slap to his face. "Fucking get in the car," he ordered.

Riki shook off the slap, though his cheek felt like it was on fire. "Fuck you," he whispered. "You're not my keeper."

Now Katze took hold of him by the shoulders, slamming him roughly against the building wall. "You're coming back with me, if I have to fucking beat the shit out of you, you little brat."

"I'm not coming back with you," Riki replied coldly, "and I'd like to see you fucking try to beat me up."

"How could you do this to Iason? You're such an ungrateful, pathetic little punk."

"He deserves it."

Katze snorted with disgust. "I should've brought my taming stick. I'd fucking tame you until you couldn't walk. How could you turn on him, Riki?"

“Because he's a fucking bastard and I hate him,” Riki answered, loudly.

Now Katze sighed, then released him. “I know you don't mean that.”

“I do mean it.”

Katze shook his head, pondering this for a moment. “Did something happen?”

“Yeah. What happened is he fucking took my life and my freedom away from me.”

“You surprise me. You really do. I would have never thought you could be this big of an ass.”

“Hmmm.” Riki shrugged.

“You...really hurt him Riki. You should have seen his face.”

Riki had no answer to this, feeling a little bad as he contemplated Iason's hurt.

Katze lit up a smoke, sighing. “Come back with me. You know you're going back one way or another. If you come back now, it'll be much easier for you than if he has to come fetch you.”

Unable to help himself, Riki shuddered at the thought of Iason coming to “fetch” him. But he remained stubborn, shaking his head.

Now Katze laughed softly. “I hope you didn't have any plans involving sitting for the rest of your life. Cuz your ass is fucking history.”

Riki scowled at this, though he knew it was true. He was not looking forward to facing Iason's inevitable discipline. But at this point, he didn't want to back down from his position of defiance. He wanted Iason to know that he would not go back to Eos willingly.

“Please. Riki,” Katze tried again, this time more gently. “I'm begging you. Come back with me.”

“No, Katze.”

The two of them locked eyes for a long moment, and Katze saw that Riki was resolved in his decision to defy Iason. He sighed.

“Then, you can expect that he'll come for you. My guess is he'll come yet tonight. If I were you, I'd say your goodbyes now. When he comes for you, he's going to be angry. But...you know that.”

Riki nodded.

"You're...so stupid," Katze said, shaking his head.

"Yeah," Riki conceded, with a smile.

Katze threw down his smoke, crushing it with his boot. "You'll be crying like a baby before the night's through. And you deserve it, too."

The mongrel answered this with a sigh.

Katze hesitated for a moment. "You won't reconsider? Come with me, Riki. I won't think less of you for backing down."

Riki grinned. "Drop to your knees and give me head right here and now and maybe I'll consider it."

"Fuck you, ya little brat," Katze replied, punching him in his arm. "You've already had the only love you're ever getting from me."

"And it was good, too."

"Of course it was." Katze flipped on his engine and his door slid open via remote control. He got in his vehicle, giving Riki one final look of disgust and shaking his head. "Good luck, dumb fuck." With that, he sped off into the night.

Riki made his way back inside, trying to determine how he would explain Katze's appearance to the others. As he approached the table, the animated conversation there suddenly stopped, and they all turned to him, silent.

Riki slid in beside Guy, smiling. "Sorry about that. Katze and I have a disagreement on a few matters."

"How do you know Katze?" Guy asked.

"I run a few errands for him now and then."

Guy visibly relaxed, looking at the others with a look of vindication.

"I bet that's how you got so rich," Sid hypothesized.

"He sure looked pissed," Noris noted.

Riki shrugged. "He'll get over it."

The mongrel then fell silent as the others began discussing the recent overthrow of the senate by a young commander on Alpha Zen. Finding no interest in the matter, he withdrew into his own thoughts, wondering how long it would be before Iason arrived and

his identity, at last, was fully revealed. He knew he was in the endgame, and so he savored these last few moments with his gang when they still thought of him as he once had been. Very soon he would be returning to Eos and the dream that he was somehow still Riki the Dark, leader of Bison, would end.

* * *

Iason's sorrow had expanded to all the reaches of his thoughts; every corner of his mind was filled with his hurt over Riki's rejection and defiance. Gradually, however, this sorrow began a sort of transformation: the Blondie's hurt changed to anger, and then rage. His fury over Riki's obstinate defiance was fully unleashed when Katze returned without his pet, shaking his head when Iason looked up expectantly.

Iason rose, and without a single word, left the penthouse.

He was so furious he could hardly drive. Thrusting the tracer card angrily into the tracer drive, he saw that his pet was still at Depravities. Somehow he found this even more annoying, that Riki wasn't even trying to hide from him. He was just waiting for him to come.

One thing was certain. His pet was in for some discipline.

* * *

"A second round," Riki announced, when the attendant returned to inquire if Riki needed anything.

"Hooray, Sir Riki," Sid cheered.

"Very good," the attendant said, backing away.

"Yes. Hooray Sir Riki," Kei said.

Everyone turned to see Kei standing there, his face still a bit bruised from Riki's pounding.

"Oh. Don't let me stop all the fun," he said, sliding in beside Guy. He leaned over, kissing Guy on the cheek. "Did you miss me,

baby? Or perhaps not. Since my guess is you've been FUCKING RIKI this whole week.”

Guy darkened a little at this, but said nothing.

“Why don't you fuck off already,” Riki suggested.

“If I thought you were going to stick around, I would,” Kei replied, with an inexplicable smile. “But since you'll be going soon, I think I'll stay.”

“Riki's not going anywhere,” Guy asserted, although he wasn't too sure, given Riki's confession that he would only be staying a few days.

“Oh? That's not what Katze seemed to think.”

Riki, who had been ready to launch a sarcastic reply, fell silent at this.

“Yes. That's right. Heard your whole little conversation out there and I have to say it was quite intriguing. Especially the bit about you and...who was it? Ah...Iason I think was the name.”

At this, everyone at the table stared at Kei in a stunned silence.

“Yes. And I was so curious about this, I decided to follow Katze. And where do you suppose he went?”

Riki scowled at this, sinking down a little in his seat.

“No guesses? Then...I'll tell you. He went to Eos, to that Elite tower there, you know, where the real important Blondies live? He went up to the penthouse. And I do believe, unless I'm quite mistaken, that the penthouse is reserved for the Head of the Syndicate. Which would be...Iason Mink.”

When Riki did not try to deny this, Guy turned to him, puzzled. “Riki. Is this Iason...the one you're involved with?”

Kei snorted at this. “Involved,” he repeated. “That's rich.”

“Fucking shut up, Kei,” Guy hissed.

“Oh,” Kei whispered, “you're really in for it later, Guy. But I'm sure you know that.”

“I told you. We're over.”

Kei slid his hand down Guy's thigh. “I don't think so.”

Now Riki reached over, grabbing Kei's hand and squeezing it painfully. “Fucking keep your hands off him.”

"I don't take orders from a pet."

The others, thinking this was simply an insult, were puzzled when Riki backed off, looking a bit surprised.

Kei smiled triumphantly. "Yes. Your little secret is out."

Guy looked back and forth between Kei and Riki, confused. "What are you talking about?"

"Go ahead. Tell them. Or should I?"

Riki glared at him, silent.

"All right then. I'll tell, since they're all too stupid to figure it out from what I said. Riki's the pet of Iason Mink."

This was not the first time any of them had heard the rumor, but it was the first time it had been presented with any sort of veracity.

Guy shook his head. "That's a lie." He studied Riki for a moment. "Right, Riki?"

Riki didn't answer. He knew this was the time to come clean, but somehow, he couldn't bring himself to admit to it. He felt uncomfortable and trapped; when he looked up and saw Iason walking toward the table, he almost felt relieved.

The others were visibly alarmed when they realized the Blondie was approaching them.

"Shit," Noris whispered. "It's HIM."

Iason carried his gold-plated chains, the ones he had specially made for Riki, with his own initials imprinted on the cuffs.

"Pet," he said, his voice sharp. "Get up, now. We're going home."

"I guess he missed his curfew then? So...does that mean he'll be punished?" Kei asked, smiling.

Iason's eyes fell on Kei's face for half a second. "That is not your concern," he said, coldly.

A little put off by this, Kei fell silent.

Riki stood up, sliding past Sid and Noris. He stood before Iason, head down. The Blondie fastened his chains angrily, slamming the cuffs closed and putting his collar on roughly. He attached the armcuff to his own wrist, snapping it shut.

Everyone watched this in astonishment, except Kei, who sat there, grinning.

Guy, now noticing the initials carved on the cuffs, suddenly thought of Riki's tattoo, and at last, what he had tried to deny for so long, suddenly became clear to him. The rumors were true. Riki truly was the pet of this Iason.

Riki reached for his helmet.

"Leave it," Iason said curtly.

"But...I'm taking my bike, right?"

"No. It's served its purpose."

Disappointed, but not surprised, Riki then dared a look at Guy, who was staring at him in disbelief. He reached into his pocket, throwing his key on the table. "Take it, Guy. I'm...sorry."

Guy let the key remain where it fell, a look of disgust creeping onto his face. "You lied to me this whole time. You're truly his pet?"

Iason, who had been about to drag Riki off, paused for a moment to see how he would respond.

"Yes," Riki said, finally, his voice barely a whisper.

Satisfied, Iason left, forcing Riki to almost run to keep pace with him.

"You're worthless," Guy called after him. "Don't ever come back!"

Now Riki turned to look back. "Am I really that much different than you?" he replied, looking pointedly at Kei.

Iason yanked on his neck chain, forcing him to turn around. "Silence," he snapped.

"Don't come back, shithead!" Guy repeated.

"You can come back if ya wanna buy us more drinks, Sir Riki," Noris quipped, and everyone laughed.

Face burning, Riki obeyed his master and did not reply. It was the response he had expected and yet, to be so soundly rejected by his former gang, was devastating. Everyone in the bar turned to watch him as the Blondie escorted him out in chains. Riki felt broken; defeated. He knew now, with utter certainty, that he could

never return to Midas again. His little dream, his fantasy week, was over. He was going back to Eos to serve his master.

His heart was starting to pound a bit now that he was near Iason. The scent of the Blondie was intoxicating and he found that he longed to be in bed with him; but he knew that he would have to endure a rather unpleasant agenda of discipline first, which he was not looking forward to.

Iason, similarly, despite his anger, was so glad to have his pet back in his company that he was strongly tempted to take Riki in the car. But...first he needed to deal with his pet's insubordination.

And to do that properly he needed...more space.

"Can we...go back to the hotel to get my clothes," Riki asked, softly.

"No."

"Please...I...left something there I want. And I...really like those clothes."

Sighing, Iason pushed Riki into the car from his side, then slid in himself, chains jangling loudly. "Very well," he conceded.

"Thanks."

As soon as the door closed, Iason reached out and grabbed Riki by the hair, pulling his head back. "You're going to be punished tonight," he warned.

"I know."

"I'm not going to be easy on you."

Riki had no reply to this and started to tremble, despite himself.

Iason leaned closer to whisper in his ear. "I'm very angry with you." He stroked his cheek with a gloved finger. "You're going to find that out."

The mongrel remained silent, and Iason started up the car. He expected his master to reprimand him continuously on the trip, but the Blondie was quiet, which Riki found somehow even more disconcerting. Riki was too upset to notice that Iason seemed to know exactly where to go. When they arrived at the hotel, Iason parked in front in the no parking zone, per usual. The attendant

rushed out to confront him but upon seeing who emerged from the vehicle, bowed. "Good evening, Sir Iason."

Iason nodded, dragging Riki behind him and pulling sharply on his chain. The mongrel struggled to keep up, though found no matter what he did, he was rewarded by another sharp tug from his master. When they reached his room, Riki started to put his hand on the ID board but was surprised when the door automatically opened for Iason.

"Do all doors open for you?" he asked, rather stunned.

"The door opened because you're my registered pet. My signature is automatically programmed into your registration. Wherever you are, I have immediate access."

"Oh," Riki muttered, feeling a little foolish for not realizing this.

"Get your things," Iason said, removing the cuff from his arm to allow his pet some movement.

The mongrel then rushed to his bedroom and gathered everything, tossing his clothes into the bags he'd kept from the store. He remembered the gift he'd gotten Iason and threw that in, too, deciding the moment wasn't right to give it to him. It would seem too much like a bribe to cut his punishment short.

When he emerged, he found Iason at the bar, drinking brandy.

"I'm ready," he said, shivering a little. He knew Iason only drank brandy when he was very angry.

Iason finished the brandy, slamming his glass on the table. "Put those down, in that chair there."

Riki obeyed, looking a little confused.

The Blondie then unbuckled his belt, whipping it out and folding it in half. "Let's get part of your punishment out of the way," he said, walking toward him menacingly. "Lower your trousers, and put your hands face down on that table."

Sighing, Riki did so without resisting, knowing that he had it coming. He stood, waiting, the air making goosebumps appear on his bare ass.

Iason was examining him, puzzled by the small bruises there. His pet had obviously already been spanked...by someone. He

walked back and forth, his anger building. Finally he unleashed his frustration on his waiting pet, striking him repeatedly, brutally, his arm whipping back with wicked resolve.

Riki initially tried not to cry out, in order to make his position of defiance retain some dignity; but in the end he was reduced to vocalizing his pain with every strike, tears blinding his eyes.

“Naughty pet,” Iason scolded, continuing to strap him mercilessly. “You’ll obey me, Riki, in all things. This is just a taste of what’s in store for you tonight. When we get home, you’re getting paddled.”

The mongrel whimpered at this, already miserable.

“I really ought to give you a good whipping,” the Blondie added, though he did not seriously intend to subject his pet to the brutality of the whip.

Now each strike from Iason elicited a loud reaction from his pet, whose ass was covered with deep red belt-marks, and who was beginning to find the punishment intolerable.

“You’re starting to feel it now, I think? Does this answer your defiance?”

“Please,” Riki pleaded. “Iason, please.”

“You’ll call me Master,” the Blondie replied, furious, unleashing a new onslaught of punishing strikes.

Overcome with pain, Riki found that he could not reply, not even to say the word he was now quite prepared to say: Master.

“Did you think you could disobey me without severe punishment?’ Iason demanded. “Did you think you could defy me so openly without recourse?”

Riki accepted his punishment miserably, keeping his hands on the table despite a powerful urge to flee. He’d learned, finally, that attempting to dodge a discipline session only resulted in even more severe punishment. Tears flooded down his cheeks, huge drops splattering onto the table, and his shoulders shook with his sobs.

Finally, Iason ceased, noting his pet’s condition with some satisfaction. Confident that he’d conveyed some of his anger to him and that his pet had suffered, his heart now softened a bit upon

hearing Riki's rather pathetic sobs. Though the punishment had ceased, Riki remained in position, dutifully waiting to be told to move.

Iason tossed his belt aside. "Riki," he said, his voice softer now. "I didn't want our reunion to be like this. But you left me no choice." He approached him, touching his punished flesh with his gloved hand. "Why did you not come back to me?" he whispered, his voice quivering a little. "Why, Riki?"

"Because," Riki answered between sobs, "because you didn't trust me. Because you came looking for me."

Puzzled, Iason thought about this for a moment. "But I only came for you because you refused to come back on your own."

Riki shook his head. "No. I mean...before. Earlier today when you came with Enyu."

For a long moment, Iason was quiet, his heart pounding. Was this all...some sort of misunderstanding?

"Then, that is the only reason you did not come back?" he asked, urgently.

"Yes."

"Pet. I did not come looking for you. Enyu is no longer in my care. I gave him to Omaki Ghan, who owns Depravities."

Now it was Riki's turn to be surprised, and for a stunned moment, he digested this information, which carried two critical bits of news; first, that Iason had not come looking for him, and second, that Riki no longer had Enyu to compete with.

"Then...then," Riki whispered, his voice hoarse from crying. "Then you...really didn't come after me?"

"No, pet." Iason answered, gently.

"Oh fuck," Riki moaned. "I thought...I thought you didn't trust me."

"Then...you would have come back on your own, Riki?"

"Of course. I wanted to come back," he admitted. "I don't really belong here anymore."

Now Iason turned him around, looking down into his eyes. "Riki," he breathed, then bent down to kiss him.

As soon as their lips touched, it was as though a torrent of passion was unleashed. They kissed one another hungrily, longingly. Iason felt as though he could not get enough of his pet, picking him up and sitting him on the table and then kissing him even more passionately. Riki was so aroused he did not even care that he was forced to sit on his punished ass. Iason removed a glove and began fondling him, pleased to find a rigid erection awaiting him.

Riki moaned in response to his touch, his eyes rolling back. Everything about being with Iason felt right; he welcomed his master's every touch, the teasing softness of his hair on his legs, his incredible scent, his perfect kiss.

Suddenly Iason stopped and, lifting him up, carried him to the bed, where he set him down gently. He undressed, and Riki did so as well, not needing to be told. His pet lay there, completely naked but for his chains, fondling himself anxiously and wiggling a bit on the bed in his excitement. Eyes shining, Iason then crawled on the bed toward him, lying on top of him and opening his legs with his body.

Riki groaned, so aroused that he could hardly think straight. "Yeah. Fuck me, Iason," he whispered.

Hands shaking, Iason reached down to fondle him a bit more, then guided his pet's hand to his own immense erection. Riki began stroking him, sending shivers through the Blondie. The sound of his pet's chains jangling was a source of arousal in and of itself. His eyes gravitated to a small vial on the bedside table.

"Is that oil?" he asked.

"Yeah," Riki replied, feeling a little embarrassed.

Although Iason wasn't too pleased with this glimpse into his pet's activities, he decided that, at the moment, all that mattered was that it was oil and that they needed it. He reached out and grabbed the vial, pouring a generous amount into his pet's waiting hand.

Riki began lubricating him, which his master responded to with a groan.

"Ohh, pet," he gasped. "I'm so ready for you, love."

"I'm about ready to shoot my wad," Riki replied, less romantically.

With that, Iason entered him, pleased when he slid right in. He'd truly broken his pet in now, and could enjoy sex without feeling constrained by Riki's smaller physiology. And he was still tight, so tight that the Blondie shivered. "Riki...you feel like heaven."

He began fucking him, slowly at first, then with more speed and intensity as they both became increasingly excited.

Riki was beside himself with pleasure. He realized in that minute how pathetic sex with Guy had been in comparison to Iason. Everything about his master aroused him; his every movement, his every touch was almost magical in its effect, and he found that all he wanted was to be in his arms. How he could ever have wanted to be with Guy now seemed a mystery to him.

He grabbed onto Iason's arms, suddenly realizing he was going to come. Iason slowed, then stopped, leaning down to watch him, clutching the sheets in his hands, just on the verge of orgasm and trying to contain himself. His hair fell across his pet's chest, its exotic, deliciously erotic scent proving the final, fatal stimulus.

Riki came, crying out loudly.

At this, Iason immediately released, throwing his head back, his long blonde hair flipping back in immense arc.

"Holy shit," Riki gasped, after a moment.

Withdrawing slowly, Iason smiled down at his pet, feeling a similar, perhaps less vulgarly worded, sentiment. "You were exquisite," he whispered.

"Yeah. I really missed that."

Now Iason rolled onto his back, pulling him close. "You're never leaving me again," he asserted.

Riki made no reply to that, at the moment not even caring.

Iason sighed, kissing his cheek. "I want to love you all night."

"You forgive me then?"

Iason laughed, hugging him tighter. "Yes. I forgive you, pet."

"Good, because my ass feels like it's on fire."

The Blondie answered that with a playful spank to his behind. "You deserved it."

Yelping, Riki pouted at this. "That fucking hurt," he grumbled. "So...you're not going to paddle me when we get home?"

Smiling at his pet's concern over the remaining agenda of punishment, he touched his nose with his finger. "That depends on how good you are."

"I'll be good. I promise," he said, a saucy smile tugging at his lips.

"Mmmm," the Blondie replied, pulling him close. "I like the sound of that."

"Hey. I have to get something...can I bring you a drink?"

"Wine would be lovely, pet."

Riki rose to leave, and Iason grabbed hold of his hand, staying him, then released his pet from his chains, uncuffing him and removing his collar. Eyes glimmering like two dark gems, Riki bent down and kissed him on the forehead and then left, a mysterious smile tugging his lips.

Iason could not help but smile at the sight of his punished bottom. It was good to have his pet back, and after discovering Riki's rebellion had been fueled by a misunderstanding, he was feeling much better. Quite good in fact.

His pet brought him a glass of wine, and as the Blondie began to take a sip, he was surprised when Riki set a small box on his stomach. "What's this?" he asked.

"Just something I got for you," Riki replied.

"Something you," now Iason fell silent, unable to finish his thought. He set his wine glass down, picking up the box with trembling fingers, then opened it, staring at its contents in complete surprise. "Riki," he whispered, astonished.

"You like them?" Riki grinned. "They're cool, aren't they? They're from Aristia."

"Aristian amber crystal," Iason said, nodding. He'd always loved Aristian crystal, but he'd never owned any, and certainly not a beautiful pair of earrings like these.

“Really? Then...you like them, right? I thought they would look good on you, you know, with your... hair and stuff.”

Now Iason was so affected by his pet's gift that his eyes began to sting.

Riki, on apprehending his expression, looked disappointed. “What's wrong? You...don't like them?”

“Riki,” Iason whispered, looking at him so intently that the mongrel almost felt uncomfortable. “You bought these...for me?”

Nodding, his pet was a little surprised when Iason suddenly sat up, throwing his arms around him and hugging him tight. “My pet,” he breathed. “I love you...so very much. You mean...everything to me.”

Relaxing, Riki smiled. “So...you do like them, then.”

“I absolutely adore them.” Iason immediately removed the sapphires he was wearing and replaced them with the new studs. “What do you think?” The gems glittered almost magically, changing colors with Iason's slightest movement.

The mongrel grinned. “They look good on you. I knew they would. You're sexy as hell. I was thinking that--”

His words were cut off when Iason began kissing him, slowly and deeply. He pulled Riki back onto the bed with him and they began another round of lovemaking, one of many that night. Whenever they finished one session, one or the other would become aroused again, and so they would start anew. Thus passed their night together in Midas, to the equal satisfaction of master and pet.

* * *

Raoul was sitting on the divan, reading the Tanagura Art Quarterly and drinking some coffee when he became aware of a small presence at his feet. He peered down at the small golden kitten, who sat there, looking up at him.

The kitten mewed.

“What...do you want?” Raoul asked, suspiciously.

As if to answer him, the kitten suddenly leapt up onto his lap, sinking his claws into his thighs.

Raoul cried out, spilling his coffee.

Yui came running from the kitchen, where he had been cleaning up after dinner, and on apprehending his master trying to disengage the kitten from his pants, could not help laughing.

"You find this funny?" Raoul growled. "He ruined my pants."

Yui quickly changed his demeanor, trying to fight off a bad case of the giggles. "Yes, Master. He is a very naughty kitty."

Finally managing to get the kitten to release his pants, Raoul held him out in front of him, perplexed. "He's vibrating," he announced.

Unable to help himself, Yui giggled. "He...it just means he likes you."

"Well, take him away. I spilt coffee on myself, too because of him."

"Yes, Master." Yui retrieved the kitten, shaking a finger at him. "Naughty kitty!" he scolded.

The kitten answered that by playfully batting at his finger.

"Yui," Raoul said sharply, as the youth began to walk away. "Did I dismiss you?"

A little surprised, Yui stopped. "I'm sorry, Master. Did you want something?"

"You are responsible for making sure that animal doesn't cause any trouble. And I think," he gestured to his pants, "we can safely say he's caused a bit of trouble here. So the question is...how are you to be punished?" A smile crept on his face, his eyes gleaming.

Realizing that his master was playing, Yui smiled. "You shall decide that, Master."

"Well said. And I do believe that I promised you a spanking, should you fail to control his behavior. Put him down and come here."

Obediently, Yui set the kitten down, who immediately darted off in pursuit of some imaginary foe.

When Yui approached him, Raoul grabbed hold of him and pulled him over his knees, tugging his pants down to his thighs. "I find that you have failed in your duties as a kitten-keeper, Yui. Therefore you must be soundly punished."

With that, Raoul commenced with a sound spanking, much to the surprise of Yui, who had not expected anything more than a few playful smacks. Not wanting his master to know how much it hurt, he fought to remain silent. Raoul, mistaking Yui's silence for a lack of pain, increased the intensity of his punishment, a little surprised at how difficult it was to phase the youth.

Yui's bottom grew redder and redder, a sight which Raoul found sexually arousing. A little frustrated that Yui did not cry out, he began a fresh campaign, spanking him so hard that at length the boy could hold back.

The agony in his cries immediately stayed Raoul, who set him back on his feet. Yui's face was distorted with emotion, tears streaming down his face. Surprised, Raoul shook his head. "I thought... why didn't you cry out?" he demanded.

"I did not want to displease you. I thought you were only playing a game," Yui replied, his voice quivering. "And I didn't want you to know how much it hurt."

"Yui," Raoul sighed, exasperated. He pulled him onto his lap, holding him close. "Yes, it was just supposed to be a game. I thought...when you didn't cry out..." His voice trailed off.

Yui smiled. "It's all right. A simple misunderstanding. I suppose I did deserve it. You're right, I failed my kitten duties."

Raoul laughed, then kissed his neck. "There's something else I want now," he whispered, guiding his hand to his erection. He unzipped his trousers, giving him full access.

A little surprised, Yui began fondling him. "Did the spanking excite you?" he asked, somewhat mystified.

"Oh yes. It did." Now Raoul kissed him hard, with purpose. "Get on your knees and bend over the divan," he ordered.

Yui obeyed, climbing off his lap with a little smile.

Raoul got up, stroking himself as he admired Yui positioned so submissively. His bottom was still red from his spanking, which he found terribly provocative. "Now...reach back and pull your cheeks apart. Offer yourself to me."

Surprised by this command, the boy obeyed, looking back at him with such innocence that Raoul nearly lost his seed on the spot. The sight of Yui so freshly spanked, bent over the divan and holding himself open with such a sweet, tear-stained expression was almost too much.

Dropping to his knees, Raoul positioned himself behind him. "Stay just like that," he commanded, squeezing the tip of his head up to his portal and then sinking himself into him.

Yui cried out at first, but quickly adjusted, gasping with each thrust, a sound that Raoul had come to adore.

"Soon, Yui," he promised, "I am going to bring you pleasure, too. I talked to Heiku yesterday...and he agreed."

Smiling, Yui heard this news with delight, wondering what it would be like. He had been too young when he received modification to have ever experienced sexual gratification and could only guess at how it would feel. His master's proposed gift had filled him with such excitement he could hardly sleep at night. It was enough just to know that he wanted to pleasure him. Now, to learn that it was truly going to happen seemed incredible, almost incomprehensible.

Raoul's approach sent shivers down his back. He loved the sound of his master coming. He always had--even before Raoul had started taking him. Now, to be the one producing such pleasure in the Blondie he adored filled him with pride and pleasure.

"Yui," Raoul moaned, finally releasing.

"Master," Yui whispered, smiling.

"Meow," the kitten said, attacking Raoul's irresistibly exposed thigh from behind.

The Blondie cried out as the little kitten sunk his claws playfully into him, his voice startling Megala Chi in the

condominium next door, who dropped his teacup, sending shards of fine Aristian porcelain and Xeronian tea across the floor.

“Raoul,” he muttered, grumpily.

Chapter 46

Belonging

“Wanna see my picture?” Aki stared up at Omaki, eyes round, hesitantly waiting to be invited up onto his lap.

Omaki smiled, holding out his hands. “Of course.”

Grinning, Aki scrambled onto his lap, opening his picture proudly. It depicted Iason's fishpond, full of colorful, bulgy-eyed fish, all hungrily eating from Aki's proffered food offerings.

“Is it good?” he asked, a little uncertainly.

“It is absolutely stupendous, Sir Aki. You are going to be a famous artist one day.”

Smiling happily, Aki leaned back against Omaki's chest and admired his work. The Blondie leaned down and kissed the top of his head and began to make specific comments about the picture, which the boy continued to hold up as if on display.

“That one right there is my favorite.” Omaki pointed to a bright red fish with a black stripe down the back.

“That's the mean one,” Aki informed him.

“Ah. I might have suspected as much.”

“He's gonna try and eat all the other ones, and then take over the whole pond for himself,” he said, excitedly, swirling his finger in a large circle to illustrate the dramatic political situation in the tiny pond.

“I see. And...supposing he succeeds with this barbaric, cannibalistic design, won't he be lonely in the pond all by himself?”

Aki paused for a moment, considering these ramifications. “He has to be alone,” he said, sadly. “Because that's just who he is.”

Omaki smiled at this, hugging him close. "Ah, Aki. No one has to be alone...no matter who they are. Some folk just choose to be alone."

Aki pondered this, letting the picture fall to his lap. "What about...a man who smells really bad?"

"Even such a man, despite his more unfortunate qualities, can still find someone to be with."

"He should look someone without a nose," Aki reflected, philosophically.

"You are on the right track, my sweet one. Or perhaps someone who simply can't smell well."

"Or maybe he should take a bath!" Aki exclaimed, pointing his finger up the sky in his excitement.

"Speaking of which, Aki, have you taken your bath yet?" Omaki asked, knowing full well that the boy had not.

At this, Aki let his hand fall into his lap, suddenly going limp in his master's lap. "I don't wanna take a bath," he whined, as if Omaki had just suggested he saw off his foot.

The Blondie smiled at his melodramatic performance. "And here we were just talking about the perils of being a smelly man. Surely you must know that smelly men only grow out of smelly little boys."

"I don't care if I smell. I can find someone who loves me the way I am," Aki asserted.

"For the record, Aki, I love you just the way you are. However, it is time for your bath. So, obey me, and go take one."

Sighing, Aki put his hand down on Omaki's thigh, and then, turning, moved up and began patting his master's erection, which had grown quite rigid as Aki had sat on his lap. "Why do you have that in your pants?" he asked, innocently.

Closing his eyes and gritting his teeth, Omaki gently--and quickly--took the boy's hand and moved it away. "That's private, Aki," he gasped.

Shrugging, Aki slid down the Blondie's leg and ran off to the bath hall.

Enyu, who had watched the entire exchange from the corner of the room, now rose and began walking toward his master, a smile tugging at his lips. "Would you like me to relieve you, Master?" he asked, softly.

"Ohhh," Omaki answered, unable to even articulate his eagerness on that point.

Enyu came closer and then dropped to his knees, helping him unzip his trousers. "He gave you a bit of a startle there, didn't he?"

Omaki smiled, swallowing, then closed his eyes as Enyu began pleasuring him with his tongue and mouth. "Oh, that's good, Enyu. Can you...flick your tongue just--yes, like that. Mmm. Now...suck me a little--ohhh. Yesss. Perfect. This is going to be...uhhn...very fast...."

Enyu reached up ran his hands up and down his master's thighs as he pleased him, sending chills down Omaki's back. He was ascending quickly, very quickly....

Suddenly, Aki came dashing into the hall, completely naked. "He can keep one of the little fish so he won't get lonely!" he yelled, then skidded to a halt, staring at his master in surprise.

At precisely that moment, the sight of the naked little boy pushed Omaki over the edge and he ejaculated, despite trying to hold back. Enyu, though startled by Aki, continued his project, as his master had not commanded him otherwise.

Although he did his best to be quiet, the Blondie could not help making some sort of vocal commentary to a release that was nothing short of exquisite.

Aki screamed.

"Aki," he gasped, but was unable to say anything further.

"He's trying to eat it!" The boy turned and ran off, terrified.

Omaki groaned, unable to resist enjoying the last few spasms of his orgasm before taking off after him.

"Wasn't that good, Master?" Enyu asked, a little sadly.

Omaki turned, a sexy smile curling his lips. "Oh. Pet. It was superb. I just...need to deal with this little matter. But I

promise...we're not through. I'm going to pleasure you next. Why don't you pour yourself a drink...and a scotch for me."

Grinning, Enyu eagerly rose and obeyed his request, excited by his master's promise.

Now Omaki went in search of Aki, who he finally found, hiding in his closet, still naked. He crouched down, smiling reassuringly at the wide-eyed boy, who was sucking his thumb.

"Now, Aki. You're old enough now not to be sucking on your thumb," he said, gently. "I didn't mean to frighten you, and I didn't expect you to come running in to see that."

Reluctantly, Aki removed his thumb. "What were you doing?"

"Remember I've told you that grown men...like certain things. When you are a grown man it will seem like a good idea to do what you saw me doing. Though I'm sure now it seems very strange to you."

"But why was he trying to eat you?"

Omaki smiled. "He wasn't trying to eat me, I promise. He was...putting me in his mouth and touching me with his tongue."

"Because he wants to suck on something?" he asked, a little longingly.

Omaki laughed softly. "Yes. But also, because I wanted him to. Because...it feels good."

Aki thought about this for a moment. "Do you want me to suck on you?"

Shivering, Omaki closed his eyes, glad that he had just released. "No, Aki. You are...too young."

"But when I'm older?"

The Blondie smiled. "We'll see."

Aki yawned.

"It's getting late. We'll skip your bath for tonight, so you can get to bed. I think you're tired. You need to get into some clothes before you get cold."

"I like being naked," Aki announced, standing up and jumping out of the closet. He began streaking around the room, parading his

body proudly. Then he reached down and grabbed hold of his small penis, contorting his face. “Uhhh!” he groaned, mimicking Omaki.

Trying not to laugh, Omaki adopted a serious expression. “That's not appropriate, Aki. Now, go get dressed like I told you. I assume you left your pajamas in the bath hall?”

Excited, the boy ignored this directive, choosing instead to walk in a circle, kicking one leg high in the air for no particular reason.

“Aki.”

“I'm Commander Khosi from Alpha Zen.”

“Are you listening to me? I told you to go get ready for bed.”

“No...Commander Aki! Commander Aki ruler of...Amoi! I'm gonna build slides everywhere!”

“Aki, this is your last warning. Do as I say or I'll sit down right here on that bed, turn you over my knee and give you a good, long hard spanking. Would you like that?”

This last threat seemed to register in the little boy's head, for he froze, foot straight out in front of him, then slowly turned his body robotically toward the door and began moving lethargically out of the room, his feet sliding across the floor in large, sweeping steps.

Omaki could not help but smile as he watched him go. But then, his thoughts grew dark as he contemplated the boy's approaching departure. He could hardly bear the thought of it. He wondered if Iason would agree to become his Guardian. He desperately hoped so, for the boy's sake. He'd thought also about asking Heiku, but he knew that Aki was terrified of the Blondie because of his robotic arm. Although he was certain the boy would become accustomed to it, probably even come to admire it, he hated the thought of putting him in a place that frightened him from the start.

At least, with Iason, he knew that Aki would love the fishpond and the gardens and pools; in fact the whole penthouse would be fun for the boy to explore. Also he could tell that Aki liked Juthian--and that Juthian was fond of him. But it was more than this. Omaki felt that if Iason became his Guardian, he would develop an

attachment to him, and so the boy would ultimately have the protection of Jupiter through Iason's influence.

He dreaded telling Aki that he would be sending him away. Just the thought of the inevitable tears made him angry, and he resented Jupiter for interfering in his private life. He forced these more disturbing thoughts out of his head as Aki returned, now dressed, his pajama top inside out.

"Now how did you manage to get that top inside out?" Omaki asked, amused.

"I like it this way," Aki asserted.

"But that way, all the stitches are showing."

"That's why I like it."

"I see. And I must say, it suits you very well."

Aki arched his back proudly. "I'm gonna wear all my clothes inside out!"

"For now, let's just restrict that practice to your pajama top," the Blondie replied, gently. "Now, get into bed, Commander Aki."

Delighted with this appellation, Aki grinned happily as he climbed into bed and scooted under the covers. He wiggled around, enjoying the feel of the bed on his legs as he spread them and closed them.

Omaki leaned down to kiss him, his long blonde hair tickling the boy's face. Aki giggled.

"Good night, Aki," the Blondie whispered, kissing him on the cheek.

"Night, Master," came the sweet reply.

Omaki rose to leave.

"Wait! I didn't get to kiss you!" Aki screamed.

Smiling, the Blondie leaned down to accept the proffered kiss, again eliciting a series of giggles when his hair brushed against the boy's face. This transfer of affections thus mutually established, Omaki returned to the great hall, where Enyu was waiting for him, the Blondie's scotch in hand. He held it out to him and Omaki took it, taking a sip as he gazed at Enyu with glimmering eyes.

“Now. I'm sorry that we were interrupted before,” he said, in a low voice.

Enyu smiled. “Is he still upset, Master?”

“Oh no. Now he's concerned primarily with his new ambition as a military commander. And...you needn't call me Master after everything you say. I'm not one of those who insists on it, though I'll be certain to let you know when I want to be addressed so. And of course, when we are in the presence of Elites, you must call me Master.”

Enyu nodded. “As you wish,” he said, feeling the urge to append “Master” to his sentence and feeling a little bold for not doing so. “Aki...seems very naive about things. Which I find odd, considering he lives here in the Taming Towers with you.”

Omaki chuckled. “Yes. But it is not as though we have masters and pets copulating in the hallways. Everything here goes on behind closed doors.”

“What does he think about all the screaming?”

“Oh, he understands that pets are brought here to be punished. He is so used to it, I doubt he even hears it.”

Enyu nodded. Omaki gazed at him with provocatively, sending chills down his back.

They both set their drinks down on the bar counter. The Blondie then put his hand on Enyu's back, suddenly pulling him close, as he bent down to kiss him, his tongue exploring him gently. The Xeronian felt as though he might fall; his master's kiss always seemed to have that effect, making him feel warm and intoxicated. Omaki's hand slid down his chest, to his robe belt, and he began working the knot there.

Suddenly there was an alert at the door.

Cursing, Omaki broke off the kiss. “Let me see who it is,” he whispered.

A little disappointed with the interruption, but at the same time feeling the need to sit down, Enyu nodded, practically collapsing in a nearby chair.

Annoyed, the Blondie strode over to the door, looking at the viewer. It was a male, quite young, holding a messenger capsule. Omaki opened the door, a little surprised.

"Messenger capsule for Omaki Ghan," the boy said, with a thick Aristian accent. He looked up at him wearily, his eyes betraying a hard life for someone of so few years.

"Indeed," Omaki said. "I can't imagine who that would be from. Do you know?"

The boy shook his head, handing him the capsule. Omaki took it. It was incredibly light. "Are you sure there's something in here?" he asked.

The boy shrugged. "Dunno. That's just what they gave me."

"You're rather young to be a messenger, aren't you?"

The boy didn't reply to this, looking away a little sadly. He shivered.

Omaki studied him for a moment. The boy was trembling. "Are you...cold?"

He nodded. "I am not used to it here."

"You're...Aristian, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Hmmm. It gets very chilly here at nights, even when the days are their hottest. Didn't you bring a jacket of some kind?"

Hesitating for a moment, he shook his head.

"Are you going back to your ship now?"

"No. I have to wait for my next job. It doesn't start until tomorrow with a different ship."

"Then...where are you going to stay?"

Now the boy looked a little uncertain. "I dunno. They gave me...2000 paper credits."

Omaki scoffed at that. "2000? Is that all you earned for your trouble? You can hardly get a good room for that, let alone food."

At this, the boy looked a little worried.

The Blondie smiled. "Would you like to come inside for awhile where it's warm? Maybe you would like something to eat?"

A gleam of excitement flashed in the boy's eyes, but he hesitated.

"Don't worry. I have my own pet. I won't try to solicit sexual favors from you," Omaki said, reassuringly. "Surely you know that in Amoi you can always trust a Blondie. We are required by the General Code to assist strangers in need. Jupiter insists on it. So?"

Offering a brief, tentative smile, the boy nodded, slowly stepping into his home. Upon seeing the luxury of the suites within, his eyes widened. Never before had he seen such a place. A fire burned pleasantly in the fireplace, its crackles and warmth relaxing the youth.

"This is Enyu, my pet," Omaki said, then added, a little proudly, "he's from Xeron."

Enyu looked at the boy in surprise, nodding.

"And you are--?" the Blondie prodded.

"Kahlan."

Omaki studied the boy again, observing the bruises above his elbows. He had obviously been handled a little roughly by someone. He was a cute little thing, with dark hair and surprisingly blue eyes, but his expression was haunting. And he looked emaciated, as though he had not been fed often. "You must be hungry. I'll have Ru make you something."

"I can do that, if you would like, Master," Enyu offered, knowing that Ru had already put in a long day and was relaxing in his room. "I know how to make an Aristian omelet."

Kahlan perked up at the mention of a familiar food he'd not had in some time--a comfort food, one that reminded him of a time when things had been...easier...and when there had been someone to care if he was hungry or not, a place where he belonged.

Omaki nodded, pleased. "Good. Then why don't you go sit by the fire, Kahlan, and warm up. I'll see if I can find you some warmer clothes."

A little ashamed to be accepting so much from strangers, but extremely grateful, Kahlan immediately went to the fire, sighing from its warmth. He had been cold for days now, miserable and

unable to sleep. The ship was run by a trader from Alpha Zen, who was used to brutal cold and kept the temperature uncomfortably low. Amoi was far warmer in comparison, but by now Kahlan was so weakened from the cold and lack of food that he was simply unable to stop shivering. He marveled over the kindness of this Blondie, Omaki Ghan, who had invited him into his home so freely, although he found the distant screaming extremely disconcerting, and wondered what sort of place this Amoi was.

Omaki returned with a warm-looking sweater of dark gray fibers. It was simple, and yet very well made, and the boy could tell immediately that it was something well beyond his means.

“This might be a little big on you,” the Blondie said, handing it to him. “But you'll grow into it.”

Kahlan reached out to accept the sweater, holding it uncertainly. “You're...giving this to me?”

“I'm not only giving it to you, I'm insisting that you take it. A messenger needs to be properly dressed. What if you have a job that takes you to Alpha Zen?”

The youth looked down at the sweater, admiring it. “This is...very fine. Thank you...Sir Omaki.”

Omaki smiled. “Put it on.”

Kahlan did so, immediately feeling the difference. At last...he had stopped shivering.

“Your omelet is ready,” Enyu announced, placing a plate down on the table.

The boy scrambled to his feet, no longer concerned about appearing too eager. He was famished, and the familiar aromas from the kitchen had been torturing him. As soon as he sat down, it was evident to both Omaki and Enyu that the boy had not eaten in some time.

“Enyu,” Omaki said, quietly. “Could you make another one?”

“Of course, Master,” the Xeronian answered, watching Kahlan with a growing sense of pity. Having never worried about having enough to eat, Enyu hardly knew what to think when confronted with a boy that seemed to be barely surviving.

The Blondie was having similar thoughts, wondering what sort of story lay behind the boy's current state, and how he came to be a messenger at such a young age. Not wanting to reveal his thoughts by staring, he turned away, remembering suddenly the messenger capsule that Kahlan had brought.

He picked it up and sat down in a chair by the fire, turning the knob on the end to release the spring. The capsule sprung open, revealing a small book. Curious, he picked it up, and flipped it over, but found no mark of any kind, nor did he find anything else in the capsule that would identify its sender.

Slowly he opened the book, and read the following:

Greetings, my dearest friend. I hope this finds you well. If you are reading this, my plan has failed, and by now I am either dead or no longer known to you, if, as I suspect, Jupiter decides to tamper with my mind. In truth, I would rather be dead than be a walking imbecile, running a smoke shop or some other hideously degrading occupation. So I hope you are now reading this and remembering me as your former friend, who has since passed from this world. If not, sweet mother of Amoi...please be so good as to shoot me in the head.

As I write this, I have set into motion a chain of events that will result in this package arriving to you on Amoi if I am not, for whatever reason, able to put a stop to it, exactly five years from the date of this letter. I have done this so that something of great importance may come to you, my dear friend, who

alone I trust on this barren planet, to take whatever action you deem fit.

You are holding in your hands my logs, which will explain to you why I believe...no--how I know--that Jupiter can be brought down. Please understand, since you are reading this, that what you are holding was deemed dangerous enough by Jupiter that I am no longer with you. Perhaps it is best that you simply destroy it.

But I leave that decision to you.

I will always remain your eternal friend.

Yousi

PostScript: As I write this I am looking at the holopic you made when the three of us took that Aristian virgin. The look on Jason's face is priceless. I think he felt sorry for her. Is he still Jupiter's golden boy? If so, Jason will be key...you cannot go against Jupiter without him.

Omaki was literally shaking. He let the book fall into his lap. It was as though, for that brief moment, Yousi had appeared before him again, his vibrancy and intellect pushing through the paper and over the boundaries of time and space to speak to him one last time.

Yousi never had a chance to say goodbye to anyone. Jupiter had seized him at his villa on the lake, and the next time Omaki saw him, he was no longer the person he once knew.

He struggled to get his emotions under control; his thoughts were racing. Yousi was gone; it was foolish to react so to a letter

written years before, and yet, he found that he could not help but react to it. Yousi had been his dearest friend.

And then...there was the content of the letter. Yousi was giving him the logs. The very logs that Jupiter deemed dangerous enough to completely destroy Yousi, rendering a former Elite cognitively impotent. The same logs that he and Iason had so recently discussed.

Enyu, sensing his master's distress, came to him. "Is something wrong, Master?" he whispered.

For a moment, Omaki contemplated telling him about the contents of the capsule. But then he decided the information was far too sensitive to share with his pet, as much as he trusted Enyu. He would speak of the matter to no one until he first spoke with Iason.

He smiled. "It is nothing of any true importance. A business worry, that is all." Omaki reached out and took hold of Enyu's hand, pulling him closer. "I haven't forgotten my promise," he whispered. "Tonight, just plan on sleeping with me in my bed."

Enyu beamed at this, delighted to be spending the entire night with his master. Omaki looked over at Kahlan and saw that the youth was about to fall asleep sitting at the table. The boy, finally fed and warm, was so comfortable that his eyes kept closing, though he struggled to stay awake, shaking his head.

"I have plenty of guestrooms here," the Blondie said, softly. "Why don't you just stay here tonight, Kahlan? You look like you could use some sleep."

Kahlan was too exhausted to object. He had been up for three nights straight, and the thought of sleeping in what was sure to be a comfortable bed was too tempting to resist.

"Enyu, can you show him to the guestroom next to your room?"

"Certainly," the Xeronian replied.

Kahlan rose and followed him, shooting Omaki a grateful look.

Suddenly Aki could be heard crying. The Blondie immediately went to him, finding him sitting up in his bed, tears running down his cheeks. He sat down next to him, pulling him close to comfort him.

“What is it, Aki?” he asked, gently, worried that the boy was traumatized over witnessing his sexual release earlier.

“I keep seeing,” Aki said through sniffs and sobs, “people without noses.”

Struggling not to laugh, the Blondie held him close, rocking him reassuringly. “I see. Poor boy. That would make it hard for anyone to get to sleep.”

Aki calmed in his master's arms, sighing. When he spoke next, it was in a voice a little more excited. “You can see inside their heads and everything.”

“Oh my.”

“I don't like the inside of heads. It's too scary.”

“Fortunately, most of the time you never see the insides of people's heads,” Omaki assured him.

“What if their heads were inside out!” Aki exclaimed.

“I imagine there would be considerable obstacles to be faced by such unfortunate persons.”

“Their brains would fall off their heads,” the boy theorized. “And then other people would step on them and stuff.”

“Which is probably why brains are typically kept inside the head,” Omaki replied, smiling. “Are you feeling better now?”

“Yeah.” Aki yawned.

“Then, lie back down and try to go to sleep.”

“I love you Master,” the boy sighed, eyes fluttering closed.

“And I...love you, my Aki,” Omaki answered, bending down to kiss him on the cheek.

* * *

Riki opened his eyes to find Iason staring at him.

“What the fuck are you doing,” he demanded, his voice thick with sleep.

Iason smiled. “Watching you sleep.”

“Like that's exciting or something. What the fuck are you doing that for,” he yawned.

“You make...little sounds. And your lip twitches.”

“Yeah? Well,” now Riki struggled to think of something critical to say about Iason, who looked absolutely beautiful when he slept, and failing to think of anything, countered dishonestly, “your face contorts in all sorts of alarming ways when you sleep.”

“Is that so?” Iason smiled.

“Yeah. And you make loud, really bizarre noises.”

“I see.”

Now Riki moaned. “Fuck. I can't move.”

Iason chuckled a little at this. “You deserved it.”

Riki snorted. “Yeah well...I'd like to take the strap to YOU just once. You'd be in bed for a week.”

“My. And what other agenda of discipline do you have worked out for me?”

“I'd tie you up and whip you with a C-19 kasey,” he retorted, smiling. “And then...no, wait! First I'd spank you with that round paddle from Omaki's box. I'd turn you over my knee and spank you like the bad Blondie you are. I wouldn't stop until your ass was red and starting to welt.”

“And after that?” the Blondie pulled him close, and Riki rested his head on his chest, smiling.

“After that,” Riki continued, now getting a little excited, “after that I'd put you in the T-stand and give you a good taming. And then I'd make YOU piss in a jar.” Pleased with this thought, Riki closed his eyes, wishing that he truly could have just one night to punish Iason thoroughly. “And then I'd fuck you raw.”

Now Riki began fantasizing about if there was a way he could accomplish such a thing. Perhaps he could tie him up while he was sleeping and then have his way with him. Of course, he would be severely punished afterwards...but it would almost be worth it.

Iason laughed. “I suppose it's fortunate, then, that I am not your pet.”

“Damn right. I'd punish you every bloody day.”

“But, Riki, if I were your pet, I would obey you without question, so there would be no need for punishment.”

"I wouldn't need a reason to punish you," the mongrel answered saucily. "As your Master it would be my prerogative. Isn't that what you always say?"

"Ah, well. I suppose you are right." Iason gazed at him for a moment. "I missed you this week, Riki."

"Yeah well. I didn't miss you."

A look of hurt pressed into the Blondie's features.

"I'm fucking kidding!" Riki exclaimed. "Damn! You're too fucking sensitive. Of course I missed you."

Smiling, Iason took hold of his chin, then moved as if to kiss him.

"I haven't brushed my teeth yet," Riki objected, moving away.

"I don't care, pet."

"Yeah but...you're all clean and fresh and I'm all...fucked up from sleeping."

"I said I didn't care."

"Let me go freshen up first!"

"I want to kiss you, and I want to kiss you NOW. Don't fight me. I'll have my kiss."

"No!" Riki pushed against his chest, attempting to wriggle free.

"Stop fighting me!"

Now the mongrel giggled, turning his face away. Iason took the opportunity to bite his neck, eliciting a squeal from his pet. Riki continued to avoid his kiss, tossing his head from side to side.

Finally Iason got fed up, and repositioned himself, pinning his pet's arms to the bed and laying on top of him, and forcing the matter. At last unable to repel his advances, Riki submitted to the kiss.

"All right. Get off me now," Riki said, rather unromantically.

Iason laughed, rolling off onto his side.

"Hey! Watch this!" Riki reached over and pressed the coffee button, grinning.

Amused with his pet's obvious delight over the coffeebot, Iason opted not to inform him that he was quite familiar with this

particular hotel amenity. When the bot came rolling up to the bed and its lid slid open, Riki grinned, picking up the two mugs.

He stared at one of the mugs in disbelief. It was gold-plated. "How the hell," he picked it up, puzzling over it. "I'm assuming the really cool one is for YOU, but how the fuck did he know you were here? That's just...creepy." He shuddered.

The Blondie couldn't resist laughing over Riki's bewilderment. "He's programmed to receive information from the door sensors, pet. He knows an Elite is here because the door opened for my signature. He just assumes you are still here from the hotel room logs."

"Oh." Riki felt a little foolish for not figuring this out himself. He poured himself some coffee and lit up, enjoying his morning smoke.

"I wish you would stop smoking, pet," Iason began.

Riki rolled his eyes. "Fucking give me a break."

"You smoke far too much. And I recall that you promised to voluntarily cut back, though I don't see any difference in your behavior."

"What? This is the first fucking smoke I've had today!"

"Give me your smokes."

"What!"

Iason held out his hand. "I'm confiscating them. You're going to be allowed six cigarettes a day from now on."

"Six! No fucking way!" Riki put his smokes behind his back, defiantly.

"Riki." Now Iason's voice was a little sterner. "Give them to me, now. I won't hesitate to punish you again, if necessary."

Sighing loudly, the mongrel slammed the pack into his master's waiting hand. "This is fucked up," he muttered, quite put out with having one of his freedoms taken away from him.

"I'm only doing this because you appear to be unable to reduce your intake on your own," Iason said, a little more gently. "And I'm concerned about your health."

Riki sighed again, refusing to answer. He took a deliberately deep drag, which backfired when he began coughing uncontrollably.

"That's just what I'm talking about," the Blondie said, coolly. "These aren't good for you."

"Come on, Iason. I've been smoking since I was eleven."

"All the more reason you need to start cutting back now."

"Please. Let me have ten a day. I can't make it on just six."

"No, pet."

Frustrated, Riki pouted, but Iason was firm in his decision, ignoring his pet's obvious ploy to change his mind.

"Well," Riki said, putting out his smoke at the last possible moment, his fingers nearly getting burned, "I'm taking a shower, then."

Iason watched him leave, smiling. He finished his coffee and then followed him, sliding open the shower door quietly.

Riki didn't hear him because of the noise of the shower, and jumped when he saw him standing there. "Holy shit! Dammit Iason! You fucking scared the shit out of me!"

The Blondie looked at his pet, dripping wet and beautiful, and shuddered. "Pet," he whispered.

"Oh fuck. Not again," Riki moaned.

Iason approached him, taking hold of his hands and pinning them above his head as he pushed him up against the shower wall. He began kissing his neck.

"Let me...suck you off," the mongrel pleaded. "My ass is so sore. I mean it was great and everything last night, but hell. I need a break. I can't believe you can fuck that many times and still get a hard on."

The Blondie smiled. "Very well. Get on your knees."

Riki obeyed, kneeling in the shower. He looked up at him, and the Blondie shivered at the sight of the wet mongrel's deliberately provocative gaze. Keeping eye contact with him, Riki proceeded to swirl his tongue around the head of Iason's immense erection.

Drawing in his breath sharply, Iason watched him, delighted. His pet was making a special effort to be seductive, which he loved.

“Good boy,” he whispered. “Just like that. Now...I'm going to come quickly. And I want to pull out, just before, and press myself up to your lips. I want to see you drink me. Do you understand?”

Riki nodded, continuing to pleasure him.

Iason took hold of his head. “Oh pet,” he gasped, excited.

The mongrel took him into his mouth, sucking him slowly, wiggling his tongue back and forth as he withdrew and took him in again.

“Perfect. Oh yes.” Now Iason pulled out, holding himself up to the mongrel's lips. “Drink me, pet.”

With that, the Blondie released, watching his semen pump out of his organ onto his pet's lips and down his chin. Riki gazed up at him as he drank him, sending shudders down his back.

“Just so,” he whispered. “Just like that. Oh, love.” The Blondie then closed his eyes, relishing his rapture. Finally, he looked down again, and found Riki still staring up at him, smiling.

“You're pretty damn sexy when you come,” the mongrel said.

“Would you like me to pleasure you, pet?”

“Later. I'm kinda dried up for now.” Riki stood up. “As much as I love sex, I have my limits. We fucked like...what...four times last night? Anyway. I don't want to waste a smoke this early in the day since I only have six.”

“Five,” Iason corrected. “You already smoked one.”

“Oh, come on,” Riki pleaded. “How about the first day you let me have seven?”

“No, pet.”

“Fuck,” the mongrel muttered, sulking. He began soaping himself angrily.

“So...that was the infamous Bison gang, then?” the Blondie said, in an effort to elicit a response from his pet, as he began washing himself.

Riki suddenly looked even more glum. “Yeah,” he said.

“And...the one with his arm around you. That was Guy?”

“Uh huh.”

Iason felt a small stab of jealousy. "Was he everything you imagined he'd be, Riki?" he asked, softly.

Riki shot him a dark look. "You fucking know the answer to that. He--they all--rejected me when they found out I was your pet."

Iason was quiet for a moment, thinking back to the evening before when he had gone to fetch his pet at Depravities. He had been so angry, he hadn't paid much attention to what had gone on there between Riki and the others. Now he remembered how Guy had called after Riki never to come back again.

"They did not treat you well," he said, thoughtfully.

"No shit, Inspector Mink." Now Riki shook his head. "I can't believe I fucking gave him my bike. It would have been better to just throw it into the ocean than to let him have it, that fucking bastard."

"And who was the one who asked me if I would punish you?"

The mongrel made a little face. "That was Kei. A fucking little shithead trying to take over Katze's market. Hand me that shampoo."

This last detail interested Iason. "Is that so?" he murmured, raising an eyebrow, as he handed his pet the shampoo bottle.

"Yeah. Apparently he thinks because Katze hasn't been around lately that he can just take over." He sighed. "Those assholes."

"You weren't expecting them to treat you so?"

"Naw, I knew they'd reject me once they knew I was a pet. I'm still mad, though. I don't know. I guess part of me hoped...maybe it wouldn't end that way."

Iason blinked, confused. "Then...why did you want to spend a week with them, if you knew they wouldn't accept you for what you are?"

"Because," now his pet grew thoughtful, looking a little sad. "Because I wanted to pretend things were still the way they once were. When I was their leader."

The Blondie sighed, closing his eyes. "I see."

"But...nothing's the same. I mean...I'm not the same."

Now Iason began helping Riki wash his hair, which the mongrel allowed, sighing. He loved it when Iason washed his hair; the feel of his fingers massaging his scalp was heavenly.

“No?”

Riki shook his head as he rinsed his hair. “I realized that this week. I don't belong here anymore.”

“And,” Iason whispered, after a long moment, “where do you belong, Riki?”

Now the mongrel smiled. “I belong with you.”

Pleased with this answer, the Blondie pulled him close, kissing the top of his head. “Riki,” he breathed. “I love that you said that.”

“Yeah well. Don't get all mushy over it. Shit.”

Chuckling, Iason pulled away. “You say you've changed. And yet you seem very much the same to me.”

“Whatever.” Riki said. “But I'll tell you what. I wish I could get some payback.”

“You mean with Bison?”

“Uh huh. Fucking pricks.”

“And...what would you do?”

“I dunno...just fuck them up a bit. I'd beat the shit out of Guy, for one.”

“Ah. Blood-vengeance.”

“Damn right. That's exactly it. Blood fucking vengeance.”

“So I suppose if I allowed you to go back to Depravities to settle your score, you'd be pleased?”

Riki stared at Iason, eyes wide. “Are you fucking for real?”

The Blondie laughed softly. “I'd like to watch my little wolf go after a few puppies.” Privately Iason was quite anxious to see Guy take a few hits from Riki. He knew it was foolish to be jealous of a mongrel, but he couldn't help himself. He hated the thought of his pet in bed with Guy and was looking forward to watching him suffer.

Now Riki turned the water off, excited. “Fuck yeah! Let's go!”

* * *

“He's been gone a long time,” Daryl said, voicing what all of them were thinking.

Katze nodded, looking at the tracer unit. “At this point, I think they must be staying at the hotel.” He sighed, looking up at Tai, who was standing by the kitchen, waiting. “It's nearly 9:00. I say let's eat.”

His decree created a small commotion as everyone scrambled to the table.

“I'm starving,” Daryl whined.

“Me too,” Juthian said, quietly, trembling a little.

Tai rushed in, putting covered dishes onto the table, and shaking his head. “It will not be good,” he fretted. “Too long for waiting.”

“Relax,” Katze said, taking a bite of a roll. “It's perfect. Sit down and eat with us.”

Hesitating only momentarily, Tai accepted the invitation, as famished as everyone else.

“Odi,” Katze called. “Put that thing down and come eat. What are you doing, anyway?”

Odi sighed, attaching the detector unit to his belt. “Trying to find hidden cameras. Iason suspects he's being spied on by Jupiter.”

“No shit?” Katze shook his head. “That's not good.”

“But I can't find anything. I've searched the whole penthouse three times.”

“Did you try looking for residuals?” Daryl asked.

Odi blinked. “No...I don't have the right equipment for that here...but that's a fucking brilliant idea. I should have thought of that.”

“What's a residual?” Katze asked.

“It's a...frequency imprint that's left behind when certain types of units are used...kind of like a magnetic field.”

“So you mean to find out if a device was used that isn't here now?”

“Precisely.” Odi smiled at Daryl. “You're a smart kid.”

Daryl shrugged. “Thanks.”

Then Odi called in Askel and Freyn, who looked a little apprehensive about leaving their posts.

"Don't worry about it. We're all here if someone tries to break in," Odi said, grinning. "I'll blow their heads off without even leaving the table."

This elicited some laughter, and soon the happy crew of seven were merrily chatting as they enjoyed their late dinner.

"I still can't believe he refused to come back with you," Daryl said.

Katze shook his head. "He's an idiot."

"That's just about the angriest I've seen Iason in awhile. Oh, but there was that day of the Art Exhibit--he was pretty mad then, too. I thought he was going to beat him to death with that taming stick."

"Didn't he get tamed that same day at the Emporium, in front of everyone?"

Daryl nodded. "That's what I heard. Raoul insisted on it. Exposed, too. Yeah, I guess that was the maddest I've seen him, that morning of the Art Exhibit."

Now Katze smiled. "I think you're forgetting another day when he was a little irate, not so long ago, love."

For a moment Daryl looked confused, then blushed. "Oh. Right."

"What's this?" Odi asked, smiling. "Come on. Spill it."

"Daryl and I got this incredibly stupid idea...technically it was my idea, but then he agreed...to talk Riki into a threesome."

Daryl shuddered, remembering the day Iason caught them all in bed together.

"You're lucky he didn't kill you both," Freyn commented, raising his eyebrows. Then he turned to Askel. "Would you stop doing that?"

Askel shook his head, looking bewildered. "What? I'm not doing anything."

"Quit making that sound....with your teeth."

"I'm bloody trying to eat!"

"Yeah but...you're always making that sound, it's annoying as hell."

"What fucking sound?"

"It's...that sound you make--like this." Now Freyn demonstrated by grinding his teeth.

"That's called chewing, moron!"

"No...when you do it you sound like a skeleton."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

"Would you two knock it off already," Odi interjected.

"But how the fuck does a skeleton sound?" Askel demanded.

"You know what I mean."

"I said knock it off, or I'll pound ya both," Odi snapped. "I'm sick to death of your arguing all the time."

"We're not arguing," Askel protested. "We're just engaged in brotherly banter."

"So," Odi said, ignoring this, and turning back to Katze, "is that why Iason whipped you?"

Katze shook his head. "No...that was for the blow job I gave Riki before that."

Odi shook his head, grinning. "You've got balls, kid."

"Actually, no."

Everyone laughed at that.

"I have to tell ya, that whipping looked pretty brutal."

At this, Daryl looked concerned, turning to Katze for some confirmation of the accuracy of his statement.

Aware that Daryl was watching him, Katze shrugged. "It wasn't so bad."

"I've heard a whipping is like the worst possible kind of pain there is," Freyn remarked.

At this, Juthian dropped his fork, staring down at his plate.

"I can think of a worse pain," Katze said, studying Juthian.

"Oh? And what would that be?" Odi demanded.

"Having your heart broke."

"Oh. Yeah," Odi conceded. "That bites."

Everyone nodded in agreement.

“So...who broke your heart, Katze?” Askel asked.

Feeling a little uncomfortable answering this in front of Daryl, Katze replied by flipping him off.

Juthian hardly heard the rest of the conversation. The talk about whippings had brought back with full force the day his master had subjected him to the brutality of a public whipping. Juthian was still hurting from that day, from all that his master had whispered in his ear, telling him that he was a bad pet and how disappointed he was in him, reiterating the obedience expected from pets and how he had utterly failed in his duties. Juthian had been extraordinarily hurt that his master would put him through such a horrible experience. The whipping itself had been ungodly. He could never have imagined such agony was possible.

And then, to be modified afterwards...all of it was still fresh in his mind, the horror and unbearable loss, not just of part of his body, but of his master's affections as well.

In an instant, everything had changed irrevocably.

And then...Juthian was still puzzled over his master's kiss. It made no sense...given all that had just transpired. The kiss almost made him believe...or hope...that his master still had feelings for him. Or that maybe he regretted letting him go.

But on the day he was given to Iason, his master had chosen to pair with the Xeronian, without even giving him a second thought.

Juthian knew he needed to put aside his foolish attachment to Xian Sami. And yet...he knew also that Katze was right. There was no pain worse than that of a broken heart.

Passion and Tears

Riki was beside himself with excitement during the drive to Depravities, repeatedly slamming his fist into his palm. "This is gonna be fucking awesome," he asserted. "You're so bloody cool, Iason."

Iason smiled at his pet's compliment. "I see. So now you approve me, then? Does that mean you're going to obey me from now on, Riki?"

The mongrel snorted at this. "That depends on what the fuck you try to make me do."

"For instance," Iason continued, "are you going to obey my smoking mandate, or will I be forced to discipline you for smuggling in contraband substances?" The Blondie smiled at the transparent surprise that crept onto his pet's face. "Or perhaps you thought I couldn't enforce that directive?"

Riki rolled his eyes, although rather annoyed that Iason had already guessed at his intentions.

"Because if you disobey me, Riki, I will punish you. And I'll tell you exactly what I have in mind. A paddling. Over my knee with a hand paddle. Exactly the way a naughty pet like you should be punished." The Blondie reached down to adjust himself, feeling a surge of arousal just thinking about it.

The movement was not lost on his pet, who shook his head at Iason's perversions. "You sure know how to ruin a moment," he muttered, staring out the window and sinking down a bit in his seat.

Iason suppressed a laugh at Riki's pout. "We're almost there. Now, Riki, don't take this too far. I want everyone breathing when we leave."

"Don't worry. I don't plan on killing anyone. I just wanna make them suffer." Now he regarded Iason curiously. "Although why should you care if I send them to their graves? I thought mongrels were nothing to you Elites."

"That's not entirely true. I can think of one mongrel who means something to me." Iason gifted him with a drop-dead gaze, batting his eyes seductively.

Riki smiled at this. "You're a big flirt." He turned his attention to the scene in front of Depravities, where Guy was standing next to his new bike--Riki's bike--surrounded by Sid, Noris, and Luke.

"Damn," Riki cursed, as the vehicle rolled to a stop. "Kei's not here."

"Leave that one to Katze," Iason advised. "Four against one--those are tough enough odds."

"I'm not worried," the mongrel retorted, cockily. "I'll be the only one left standing."

The Blondie laughed softly at his pet's confidence. Riki suddenly leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Thanks for this," he whispered.

Riki then got out of the car and sauntered toward his old gang, hands in his pockets.

"Whadya know. It's Sir Riki," Noris said.

"Did you come back to buy us more drinks?" Sid asked, and the others laughed, except Guy, who glowered at him.

"Where's that pretty Master of yours?" Luke asked, then nodded toward Iason's vehicle. "I suppose he's sitting in that fancy hybrid there, watching you."

Riki ignored these comments, locking eyes with Guy, who glared back at him darkly.

"You've got a lot of fucking nerve coming back here," he said, his voice dark and low. "Even if you came back on your knees begging, we wouldn't accept you."

“Is that so?” the mongrel replied, calmly. “Hmmm. Because I'm pretty sure that by the time I leave, you'll be on your knees, begging for mercy.”

Guy laughed at this. “What, you think you can take on all of us?”

Riki answered this with a hard punch to his face, sending him sprawling backwards and knocking over his bike. “I know I can,” he said, grinning, and immediately spun around, landing a second punch square into Sid's jaw.

Noris and Luke both lunged for him, but Riki stopped Luke with a hard kick to his groin. The youth fell to his knees, silent for a long moment before he began screaming in agony, his part in the fight decidedly at an abrupt end. Then Noris swung at him but Riki evaded him, delivering a brutal punch to his stomach. Noris bent over, eyes bulging, unable to catch his breath.

Now Guy managed to stagger back to his feet, taking a swing at Riki, but the mongrel easily dodged him, laughing, then punched him again in the face and pushed him to the ground. He straddled him, pounding him mercilessly.

Sid now scrambled to his feet and started toward him again, but Riki sensed his approach and quickly turned, slamming his elbow into the youth's face. Sid screamed, holding his now broken nose as blood gushed down his face.

A small crowd of onlookers had gathered, but no one made any move to intervene. They saw that the odds were against Riki, and it would have been against Midas street code to interfere. Many of them had been there the previous day when Riki had been escorted from the club in chains by the beautiful Blondie Iason Mink, definitively answering the rumors that had been circulating the mongrel since his disappearance over two years before. They had witnessed the taunts from his old gang, Bison, and so now to see him come back to exact blood vengeance inspired admiration and respect from the onlookers. Unlike the members of Bison, many there--mostly Midas citizens--envied Riki his status as the pet of the Head of the Syndicate, and felt no contempt for him whatsoever.

“So...you'd accept me, no matter what, huh, Guy?” Riki hissed. “You worthless prick. The sex sucked, by the way.”

Guy was now too disoriented to reply, fading in and out of consciousness.

Now Riki's eyes gravitated to his bike key, which had fallen to the ground during the skirmish. Scooping it up, a naughty smile curled his lips as he flipped Guy onto his stomach and yanked down his pants. The sight of fresh switch marks on his ass elicited a laugh from the mongrel. “It looks like your Master wasn't too happy with you last night either,” he taunted. Then he leaned closer. “Are you enjoying my bike, Guy?”

With that, the mongrel pressed his keys past his old lover's portal, shoving them as far up his ass as he could. Guy cried out as the keys tore his flesh.

“I put your keys in a special place, Guy. You might need a little help retrieving them. Now every time you start up MY bike, you'll think of me.”

Riki leapt to his feet, gifting him with a final kick. “Bastard!”

Noris, who had finally regained his breath, now stumbled forward in a rather pathetic attempt to tackle him, but the mongrel put an end to this new assault by knocking him unconscious with one fell punch.

The onlookers cheered and Riki smiled, saluting the crowd as he stepped over the bodies and made his way back to the vehicle.

Iason watched the entire fight, his heart pounding. At first, he was a little worried about his pet. But after only a few moments, he relaxed, enjoying the performance as Riki unleashed his vengeance like a wild animal, beautiful and perfect in his fury. It was almost like a dance, the lovely dark mongrel moving with such grace and precision, so forceful and powerful. Riki spun around, kicking one opponent and then easily evading every counterattack, as though by some battle magic. He moved so quickly that it was difficult to even see his art, but the groans, and the blood, and the bodies lying on the ground were evidence of his handiwork.

As the Blondie watched, he became incredibly aroused, despite having released but an hour before. The mongrel was so enticing to him that he could not resist unfastening his trousers and fondling himself as he watched. He lowered the window a bit to get a better look, enjoying the flexing of his pet's muscles, his uncompromising focus and his dark, menacing glare. He was not sure what to think when Riki exposed Guy, and for a moment he feared that his pet planned to take the mongrel, an act that the Blondie would have felt compelled to prevent. But his pet suddenly rose and kicked the whimpering youth, then walked away.

Watching Riki hurt and humiliate Guy gave Iason immense satisfaction. He was admittedly jealous of his pet's old pairing partner, deeply resenting the week he had spent with him, no doubt engaging in all sorts of sexual escapades. The Blondie was glad to see him suffer, especially as it came from Riki's own hand. Iason desperately hoped--and suspected--that this would bring a definitive end to whatever attachments his pet still had for his old lover.

As Riki approached the vehicle, he fumbled to fasten his trousers, feeling somehow inclined to hide his arousal from his pet.

Riki jumped in the vehicle, wrinkling his nose in a rather cute fashion and gifting him with a saucy smile, looking rather proud of himself.

"Your hand," Iason exclaimed, concerned.

"It's not my blood," his pet replied, a little smugly, his eyes immediately drawn to Iason's groin, where his erection was far too immense to hide. "You pervert," he whispered, his eyes shining as a smile tugged at his lips.

Iason answered that with a seductive look, spreading his legs a bit as if to acknowledge his arousal.

Riki suddenly reached over, grabbing the back of his head and kissing him, his tongue swirling deep inside the Blondie's willing mouth as he rested his hand suggestively on his thigh. "Let's fuck when we get back," he said, pulling away.

Jason needed no persuading, immediately putting the car into D6 and peeling away at head-turning velocity.

* * *

Kahlan dreamt of peaceful things, of warm homes and good food, of kind strangers and soft, comfortable beds. He woke with a start to find a small, wide-eyed boy peering down at him, his medium-length hair tousled wildly about his face.

“Who are you?” Aki asked, excited.

“Kahlan,” he answered, smiling. “And...you are?”

“Aki,” the boy answered proudly. “I’m eight.”

“That’s...good.” Kahlan yawned.

“How old are you?” Aki demanded.

“Twelve.”

“Why are you sleeping here?”

“Because...Sir Omaki invited me to.”

“Why aren’t you sleeping in your own bed?”

“Well,” now Kahlan sat up, searching for his smokes. “I don’t really have a bed.”

Aki looked dubious at this assertion. “Then where do you sleep?”

“Wherever I can. Usually on the ship I’m working.”

At this, Aki brightened, jumping up onto the bed. “You work on ships?”

“Uh huh.”

“What do you do?”

“I’m a messenger.”

“Where’s your Master?”

“Don’t have one.”

Aki’s brow furrowed at this. “Then who takes care of you?”

“I take care of myself.”

Now Aki peered closely at him. “Blue! You have pretty eyes,” he announced.

Kahlan smiled. “So do you.”

"I do?" At this, he straightened up, looking at Kahlan in a way that suggested his hope for more compliments.

"Yeah...they're almost gold-colored. They look nice...with your brown hair."

Aki beamed at this praise, bouncing on the bed in his excitement. "So have you been to lots of planets?"

"I suppose."

"Which ones?"

"Let's see...well, Aristia, of course, since that's my home planet, Xeron, Alpha Zen--"

At the mention of Alpha Zen, Aki suddenly stood up on the bed. "Did you see Commander Khosi?" he yelled.

Kahlan laughed. "No. But it's pretty interesting there now, especially in the capitol city."

Aki was beside himself with excitement. "You've been to Ultanum?"

"Yeah. It's...a pretty cool place. But...it's too damn cold for my taste."

"Oh," Aki replied, the realization that Alpha Zen was a cold planet dashing all his hopes to relocate there.

"But then...I'm used to beautiful, warm weather."

"Is that what it's like on Aristia?" Aki sat back down, moving a little closer.

"Yeah. It's perfect."

"Then why did you leave?"

At this, Kahlan looked a little sad, turning away. "Because...there was nothing for me there."

Aki, sensing his sadness, was quiet for a moment. "Did something bad happen?" he asked, finally, in a low voice.

"Aki," Omaki said, sternly. He was standing in the doorway, hand on one hip. "What are you doing? You know better than to barge into a guestroom like that."

"It's okay," Kahlan said.

"He knows better," Omaki replied. "Come here, Aki."

Reluctantly, Aki climbed off the bed and slowly walked toward his Master, head down. When he was within reach, Omaki grabbed his arm and proffered a few hard spanks to his behind, just enough to produce an equivalent number of yelps.

“That's just a warning, Aki. Now, you're not to bother guests, and you must never enter their rooms.”

Aki pouted at this, rubbing his bottom.

“You're off to a shaky start this morning. Behave yourself today or you'll end up over my knee for a real spanking. You won't like it if I have to spank you again, Aki. Understood?”

“Yeah,” Aki said, softly.

“Now, have you brushed your teeth?”

Aki nodded.

“Then you may go and play. Stay out of trouble.”

“Yes, Master,” Aki said, meekly, then ran off to begin his morning adventures.

“I apologize if he bothered you.”

Kahlan shook his head. “He's a nice kid.”

Omaki smiled at this. “Kahlan. I have a proposition for you.”

The youth looked a little surprised, and a bit alarmed, his eyes widening. He considered the Blondie, dressed so provocatively in black leather, a small whip hanging threateningly from his belt, and wondered what Omaki would demand from him. He shivered, worried.

The Blondie laughed. “Not that kind of proposition. May I come in?”

“Of course.”

Omaki entered, sitting down on the edge of the bed and crossing his legs. “How would you like a job here at the Taming Tower?”

Kahlan was so shocked at this offer, he was unable to reply.

“You'd have free room and board. I'd pay you 8000 credits a week. Your duties would vary; there are lots of details to attend to here, what with the operation of the brothel as well as all the suites in the tower. I could really use some help just now, with the Alpha

Zen trade convention coming up. Do you know how to use a computer?"

"No," Kahlan answered, a little ashamed.

"No matter. I can teach you easily enough. Can you drive?"

At this, Kahlan straightened. "Yes."

"Excellent. I'd probably have you run quite a few errands. So. What do you think?"

Kahlan was speechless. It was an amazing offer--the pay far exceeding what he was currently earning, plus room and board...and he would be working for the kind Blondie who had taken him in.

"I see. Perhaps...you would like to think about it?" Omaki said, mistaking his silence for disinterest.

"No! I mean...I would be most...that is...yes, I accept," Kahlan stammered.

Omaki smiled. "Good. You can stay with me here the next few days until I get your room set up. Now, I guess I should warn you, we have all sorts of traffic here, and you'll have to watch your back. I'm sure you'll be noticed, with your good looks and such. I'll arm you, of course, and once the regulars know you work for me, you won't need to worry about them."

The boy smiled at this. "I can take care of myself."

The Blondie nodded, feeling almost envious of the free-spirited, street-smart youth. "I'm sure you can. Are you hungry? Breakfast is waiting for you."

"Yes," Kahlan admitted. Although he had eaten his fill the night before, he was now famished again. "Sir Omaki...is there somewhere...I can smoke?"

At this, the Blondie considered him for a moment. "You're a bit young to be smoking," he commented, then caught himself. "But of course, that is your own business. You can smoke out on the balcony. It's just off the breakfast nook. I'll show you."

As Kahlan followed him, he felt a strong sense of longing; he liked this Blondie and suddenly wished that he could stay with him in the warm, comfortable dwelling forever. Pushing such thoughts

out of his mind, he focused on Omaki's offer, excited that he would no longer be forced to take horrendous, low-paying messenger work, subjected to all sorts of abuse at the hands of unsavory shipmates. Though he had managed to avoid outright rape, despite a few very close calls, Kahlan had been roughed up enough to dread the long space voyages, when he was invariably targeted because of his youth and good looks.

Although Kahlan did not fully appreciate the effect his appearance had on others, he was stunningly attractive, with striking blue eyes, dark hair, and fair skin--a combination that was quite exotic. His slight frame made him seem even younger than his actual years, encouraging even more interest from sex-hungry predators. He had been forced, on two occasions, to pleasure his shipmates--both times rutting Xeronians who cornered him before being restrained by the rest of the crew. Too young to appreciate these encounters, Kahlan was completely repulsed, now quite reluctant to share quarters with Xeronians. This Enyu--Omaki's pet--had him a bit worried, although at present he seemed to be no threat; he was even friendly, or so it seemed to the affection-starved youth.

Now Omaki turned back to smile at him. "You can take today off. Go explore the city if you like. There's plenty to see."

Kahlan grinned, almost bursting with excitement. After a good meal and a long night of sleep in the most comfortable bed he'd ever encountered, a day of exploring Midas--the infamous Pleasure City of Amoi--was an extremely attractive prospect to the inquisitive youth. After a smoke and a very big breakfast, Kahlan set out, feeling the happiest he'd felt in a very long while...certainly since the terrible day, nearly two years before, when his world had been turned upside down.

Omaki was pleased to see Kahlan looking so happy and was glad he'd accepted his offer. He wasn't sure why, but he felt an urge to watch over the boy. Perhaps it was his emaciated appearance, his haunted gaze, or the telling bruises on his arms, but the Blondie felt protective of the Aristian.

He was convinced the boy was orphaned, for he could think of no other reason why someone so young would leave Aristia--an absolute paradise--to work as a messenger, a dangerous occupation that offered miserable wages. And the fact that he had done so proved he was willing to do just about anything to avoid working in a brothel, an option that would have been readily available to him on Aristia and would have provided him with a fairly comfortable lifestyle. For this reason, Omaki chose not to offer him a position in the Taming Tower brothel. But he was not giving him work out of charity; the Blondie could truly use a young, energetic boy like Kahlan to help him out.

Omaki sat at his desk, pondering this matter as well as the troubling correspondence from Yousi, when he received a call from the brothel informing him that Aki was loitering in the foyer there, a place that was specifically off-limits to the boy.

"Don't tell him you called me," the Blondie replied, curtly. "But don't let him inside. Keep an eye on him for me."

"Yes, Sir."

Omaki cut the transmission, angry. He had made it perfectly clear to Aki on numerous occasions that he was forbidden to go near the brothel on the sixth floor. In fact, he was not even allowed to be on the sixth floor. Aki's disobedience infuriated him, because the brothel was dangerous; with many foreigners frequenting its suites, it would be easy enough for a pretty young face like Aki's to draw the interest of a client who could then lure him into one of the rooms there.

He waited impatiently for Aki to return, fuming. When at last the boy came running inside, he managed to rein in his anger enough to address him calmly.

"Aki," he said, softly, but firmly. "Come here."

The boy stopped, looking at him in wide-eyed surprise. He knew immediately from his Master's expression that something was up. Guilt began to increase the pounding of his heart; what if he had discovered he had been playing near the brothel? He walked toward him slowly.

“Aki, were you on the sixth floor today?” the Blondie asked, looking directly in his eyes.

“No,” Aki replied, fidgeting a little.

The lie only served to increase the Blondie's anger. “Aki, I already know you were at the brothel. And now we both know you've just lied to me.”

With that, the boy began to cry.

“I see. You're smart enough to cry, knowing what's coming, but you're not smart enough to stay away from the brothel, which I SPECIFICALLY TOLD YOU WAS OFF-LIMITS?” Omaki's voice rose, betraying his anger.

Now Aki began chewing on his finger as he wailed, terrified. It was unusual for his Master to be so angry, and he was horrified, knowing that certain punishment was imminent.

“Why did you disobey me, Aki?” the Blondie demanded.

“I don't know,” came the pathetic, tearful reply.

“You're really in for it, Aki,” Omaki warned, grabbing hold of him and pulling him up onto his lap, then turning him over his knee. “I'm going to teach you to obey me, naughty boy.” With that, the Blondie proceeded to tug down his pants, revealing his bare bottom.

“No,” Aki pleaded, reaching back to cover his exposed flesh with his hands. “I won't do it again! I won't!”

“It's too late for that now, Aki. You've disobeyed me and now you're going to be punished.” Omaki took his hands and pinned them behind his back with one hand.

“No!”

Now Omaki leaned down, as he rested his hand threateningly on the boy's bottom. “Yes, Aki. You're about to get the spanking of your life. And this should teach you to STAY AWAY FROM THE BROTHEL.”

At this, Aki began struggling and kicking in a futile attempt to wriggle free from his Master's grasp.

“Stop fighting me, Aki,” Omaki said, sharply. “You're only making things worse for yourself.”

“I hate you!” Aki shouted. “You're mean!”

Stung by these words, although he knew the boy did not truly mean it, Omaki repositioned Aki on his knee for the best angle before replying. "This is what happens," he said, through gritted teeth, "to naughty little boys who don't mind their Masters."

The Blondie then proceeded with a spanking that he hoped the boy would never forget, gifting his exposed flesh with hard, uncompromising, loud smacks, much to Aki's complete despair. The boy wailed his misery and anguish, struggling and kicking all the while. Omaki was so angry that he was completely unmoved by Aki's cries; he focused his attention on making sure the boy's punishment was so severe, he would never think of setting foot on the sixth floor again. Aki's bottom and thighs quickly reddened from his Master's spanking, but still Omaki continued to spank him without mercy; now he was even beginning to enjoy it, despite his anger.

"Are you learning anything from this, Aki?" he asked, as he continued to administer his brutal punishment. The boy was unable to answer, wailing hysterically. "You will NEVER disobey me again, naughty boy! Or this is what will happen. Next time I'll paddle you-- I guarantee you, you won't like that one bit."

At last, Omaki brought the spanking to an end, allowing the boy to sob on his knees for a few moments as he let his hand rest on his hot, soundly disciplined flesh. Now that the punishment was administered, the Blondie became aware of his arousal. The sight of the boy's punished bottom positioned so invitingly over his knee and the warmth of his bottom on his hand was too much. Perhaps a little roughly, he tugged the boy's pants up and set him on the ground.

"Go to your room," he said, sternly, proffering one final spank to the boy's bottom.

Aki obeyed, running from the room in tears as he held his sore behind.

The Blondie then quickly unfastened his trousers, releasing himself with a groan. "Enyu!" he called out, almost impatiently. The Xeronian was immediately before him, ready to assist.

Omaki, still angry and rather worked up, seized him and pulled him onto his lap. "Straddle me," he commanded, in Xeronian.

A little surprised, Enyu obeyed, lifting his robes as he positioned himself on the Blondie's lap. Omaki, unable to wait, reached under his robes, taking hold of his hips and forcing his pet down onto his erection. "Oh yes," he moaned, as Enyu whimpered from the penetration.

Omaki closed his eyes, shuddering. "I'm sorry, my pet," he murmured, as he began lifting and lowering Enyu rather violently. "Ohhhh."

The Xeronian, though initially rather overcome with pain, eventually began to loosen up and enjoy the experience.

"Kiss me," the Blondie demanded, opening his eyes.

Enyu did so, and his Master continued to manage the cadence of their fuck while they kissed. Digging his nails into his pet's flesh, Omaki announced his ascent, suddenly breaking away from their kiss.

"You're gripping me exquisitely, my Enyu," he gasped, then began moaning, rather loudly. "Oh yes. I'm releasing now."

With that, the Blondie climaxed, groaning his pleasure.

Enyu smiled, enjoying the expression on his Master's face. He reached under his robe to fondle himself, now painfully aroused.

As Omaki became aware of his activities, he grabbed his hand. "Let me pleasure you," he whispered, smiling.

"Yes, Master," Enyu agreed, happily.

"I know I hurt you. Let me...make it up to you. Would you like to take me?" the Blondie asked, bluntly.

Astonished, Enyu simply stared back at him, unable to believe his ears.

Omaki laughed softly. "Why so surprised? I'm partial to a good fuck every now and then. Or are you not interested?"

"Oh!" Enyu exclaimed. "Yes! I mean...yes...Master. I would...love that."

"Then get up. Let's go to my room and get completely undressed."

Enyu needed no further prodding; he scrambled off his Master's lap and followed him, excited, to the Master bedroom. His eyes were drawn to the Blondie's tantalizing ass and narrow waist, his skin-tight leather ensemble advertising his decidedly sexy body. He had been lusting after his Master all morning, and to now be following him into the bedroom, knowing he was being given the opportunity to take the Blondie, made his organ twitch with unbearable readiness. Omaki was already undressing, and by the time he reached the room, he spread his legs and bent over the bed, presenting his beautiful, delightfully curved bare ass to Enyu.

The Xeronian was so excited he almost ejaculated on the spot. He fumbled with the belt on his robe and let his garment fall to the floor, quickly positioning himself behind his Master, as though afraid the Blondie would suddenly retract his offer.

He pushed himself up to Omaki's portal, hands on his hips, then hesitated. His Master looked back at him, eyes shining intoxicatingly. "Go ahead, my pretty pet."

Shivering, Enyu proceeded, slowly sinking into the Blondie's depths. "Ohhh...Master," he purred, closing his eyes. He explored his Master a little tentatively, hardly daring to believe he was actually inside the Blondie.

"Fuck me harder," Omaki encouraged, with a wicked little smile.

Enyu widened his stance and proceeded to obey this mandate, taking the Blondie aggressively. Not since his days in Hiroshi's palace had he been given the opportunity to enjoy such pleasure, and certainly not with a Master, nor anyone so beautiful as Omaki Ghan.

Suddenly, Enyu gasped as he felt the Blondie tightening, squeezing him rhythmically and quickly--almost vibrating against him.

"Master," he called out, excited. "Oh! I...like that!" The Xeronian began moaning, biting his lip.

Omaki smiled, pleased with his pet's reaction to his physiology. He knew perfectly well what Enyu referred to, having enjoyed a few

Blondies in his impetuous youth, including Megala Chi and Sanyara Zeax. He'd also set his sights on the infamous Academy lovers Iason and Raoul, but never managed to seduce either. The closest he'd come to taking Iason was the afternoon he and Yousi passed with the then young Mink, the three Blondies ravishing a female captive from Aristia. Omaki had been more excited by the sight of Iason's body than by the uncooperative girl, who was, nevertheless, a delightful acquisition, one which Iason had been first to enjoy as Omaki and Yousi held her down. At any rate, Omaki knew what a Blondie felt like during coitus; it was one of the things that puzzled him most about Jupiter's prohibitions, for why should Jupiter forbid her Blondies to engage in pleasures their bodies were obviously designed for?

Enyu, although no longer rutting, was so aroused he reverted to his interval persona, almost growling as he took the lovely Blondie. "Yes," he hissed, his nails digging into Omaki's hips as he thrust into him with aggressive strokes. "Keep squeezing me...just like that."

"Do you like this position? Or shall we try something else?"

At this, Enyu suddenly withdrew. "Lie on the bed, face down."

Smiling at his pet's command, Omaki obeyed. As soon as he was positioned on the bed, the Xeronian entered him again, enjoying the feeling of power over the Blondie as he penetrated him from behind. He reached under his Master's chest and grabbed hold of his shoulders as he fucked him. Nuzzling Omaki's neck, he began to purr.

"Oh my," the Blondie breathed.

Enyu bit his neck, eliciting a gasp from his Master. "I like fucking you," he asserted.

"Is that so?" Omaki gasped, a little surprised by how hard his pet was taking him. "I must admit...I rather like being taken by you."

Excited, Enyu grabbed onto the Blondie's hair and pulled his head back. "You looked so sexy today in that leather outfit. I've been watching you all morning."

“Ohhhh.” Omaki was thrilled with his pet's domineering attitude, feeling a second erection beginning.

“With that little whip,” Enyu continued, “hanging down from your belt, brushing against your thigh. Were you deliberately trying to taunt me?”

Omaki smiled. He wore the whip and dressed in hardcore, suggestive street clothing and jewelry simply to impress his clients, who were typically shocked to see an Elite so attired. But he was enjoying his pet's game. “Yes,” he answered.

“Hmmm.” Enyu nibbled his earlobe. “Then...perhaps I should punish you?”

The Blondie's heart began to pound faster. “Yes,” he replied, closing his eyes and swallowing. “I most definitely...should be punished.”

“Then...I think I shall tie you up and give you a good strapping.”

“You wouldn't dare.”

“Oh wouldn't I?” Now Enyu was perilously close to his critical point and began to tremble.

“You're about to come, I think,” his Master said, knowingly.

As if released by the Blondie's words, the Xeronian climaxed, shudders of pleasure coursing through his body. He collapsed onto his Master's back, then finally withdrew, rolling onto his back.

Omaki turned onto his side, smiling. “So, you had an agenda of discipline worked out for me, my pet?”

Now the Xeronian blinked, his senses returning to him. “I'm...sorry, Master,” he stammered. “I was...I was...excited.”

“That much was evident,” Omaki whispered. “But don't be sorry. I assure you...I thoroughly enjoyed it. And...in my view, I wouldn't have minded if things had gone...to the next level.”

“Truly?” Enyu studied the Blondie, amazed.

“Oh yes. Let's just say...I have a taste for such things.” He laughed. “Why do you suppose I built the Taming Tower?”

Enyu pondered this for a moment, savoring the thought of disciplining the Blondie.

Omaki was amused at his expression. "You and I...are going to have some good times together, I think."

"Yes, Master."

"Stop calling me Master," Omaki snapped, then caught himself. "What I meant to say is...when we are in the bedroom, unless I instruct you otherwise, call me Omaki."

"Oh," Enyu replied, feeling a little anxious about this new directive. He'd never addressed a Master by his given name. "Yes...yes," he stammered, unable to bring himself to say his name.

Omaki laughed. "Yes...what?" He leaned closer. "Go on. Say my name."

"Yes...Omaki," the Xeronian whispered, uncertainly.

"Yes," the Blondie said, pulling him close. "I like that. I like that very much. Say it again."

"Omaki."

"Now...what would you say if next time I call YOU Master, and you discipline me, the way you threatened to just now?"

Enyu swallowed hard, unable to quite believe what the Blondie was suggesting. "As you...wish," he said, finally.

"And," Omaki whispered, kissing his neck, "I want you punish me...severely. Don't hold back."

Now the Xeronian began to tremble, both nervous and excited about this proposal. "Are you sure, Master?"

At this, Omaki broke away, and gave his pet a hard smack on the bottom. "What did I just tell you? Call me Omaki."

Surprised, Enyu stared back at him.

The Blondie laughed. "Oh my. Your expression is priceless. Perhaps I'll have to forgo my own discipline session next time and instead punish YOU."

Enyu, much less enthusiastic about this proposal, remained silent.

"I see." Omaki took hold of his chin. "You're not too keen on that idea, are you?" He leaned down and gave him a soft kiss, then began nibbling on his neck. "Oh but...that's what would make it

absolutely delightful. Perhaps next time I'll turn you over my knee and give you a good hard spanking before I fuck you."

The Xeronian flinched a little at this threat, remembering all too well another spanking at the hand of a Blondie.

The talk of spankings reminded Omaki of Aki's recent punishment, and he became aware of the boy's whimpering. He sighed, sitting up. "But...for the moment...I have something I must attend to." He rose, and began to dress. "I enjoyed that, pet. Did you?"

Enyu nodded happily. "Very much. It was...perfect."

Smiling, Omaki finished dressing and then made for Aki's room, pausing outside the door. His heart softened as he listened to the boy's pathetic whimpering and sobs within. He hesitated, not wanting to dilute the effect of the punishment quite yet. Turning, he went to one of his closets, one which housed a variety of discipline instruments, and selected a good-sized, round hand paddle, one he was sure would get the boy's attention. Then he returned to Aki's room and opened the door.

Upon seeing his Master enter with a paddle in hand, the boy immediately sat up, shrieking.

"Calm down," Omaki said, sharply. "I've not come to discipline you again."

Aki quieted, his eyes locked on the paddle.

"Yes. I've come to show you what's waiting for you, should you dare disobey me again and even step foot on the sixth floor," the Blondie said. He twirled the paddle in his hand. "I'll take this paddle to your little behind so hard you won't be able to sit down for a week. Understood?"

Aki nodded, eyes wide.

"I hope so. Because, Aki, I'm warning you--a good paddling is far worse than the spankings you've endured so far." To illustrate, he suddenly smacked the paddle against his own thigh, producing a loud, intimidating sound that he knew would be frightening to the boy.

Aki flinched, backing up against the headboard of his bed.

“But...I'm not going to need to do that, am I? You're going to mind me, isn't that right?”

Aki nodded. “Yes, Master,” he whispered, his voice hoarse from crying.

“Good.” Now Omaki sat down on the edge of the bed, putting the paddle aside. “Now. Come here, Aki,” he said, gently.

Relieved, the boy crawled toward him, sighing when his Master took him onto his lap, though he winced a little, his bottom still dreadfully sore. He snuggled up close to the Blondie, closing his eyes.

“I had to punish you, Aki, because you disobeyed me, and then you lied to me. It's very important that you mind me when I tell you not to do something. The brothel is a dangerous place. I don't want anything to happen to you...you're very precious to me.”

Aki sighed again, feeling much better now that this Master held him close.

“I imagine your bottom is hurting, isn't it?”

“Yeah,” the boy admitted, his voice wavering a bit.

“So, I hope that will remind you to obey me?”

“Uh huh.”

“Good boy.” Now the Blondie fell silent, rocking the boy in his arms.

“Master,” Aki said, finally.

“Yes, my love?”

“I...don't really hate you,” the boy said, tearfully.

Omaki smiled, hugging him closer. “I know you don't.”

“Are you still mad at me?”

“No, pet. I am not mad.” He leaned down and kissed the top of his head. “In fact, would you like to go on a little trip with me? I need to visit Iason Mink.”

At this, the boy brightened, sitting up straight. “Can I feed the fish?” he asked, excited.

“We'll have to ask Sir Iason, won't we?”

“He'll let me!” Aki asserted, confidently.

“And...what makes you think so?”

“Because...he's nice,” the boy said, thoughtfully.

Omaki was pleased to learn Aki's perceptions of his potential Guardian. He smiled, and kissed the boy again. “Then, if you want to come with me, go wash your face.”

“Okay,” Aki agreed, carefully climbing off his lap and then running to the bath hall. The Blondie watched the boy longingly, feeling so much love for him that he thought he would burst.

* * *

Juthian was at the pavilion, buying some oil for Master Iason, when he became aware of a familiar presence, recognizing Xian's distinctive scent. He turned and found his former Master staring down at him.

“Ju,” he said, softly.

“Ma--Sir Xian.”

For a moment neither of them said anything as they gazed at one another.

“Is...Iason treating you well?” Xian asked, finally.

“Oh...yes.” Juthian averted his eyes.

The Blondie felt a stab of jealousy when Juthian avoided his gaze, wondering if Iason had enjoyed the boy already. He wanted to ask if this were the case, but knew it would not be appropriate. His eyes gravitated to Juthian's hand, and when he saw the vials of oil, he bristled.

“Are you buying those at Iason's command?” he asked, his eyes dark.

Juthian nodded, feeling a little embarrassed. He knew Xian would mistake the errand, but he didn't feel it was his place to expound on Master Iason's orders.

“I see,” Xian said, a little coolly, his jealousy eating away at him. He studied Juthian for a moment. “Ju,” he whispered.

Juthian looked up at him, his beautiful dark eyes glimmering with tears.

Surprised, Xian reached down, his gloved finger capturing a tear that, at that moment, began its path down his cheek. "Is he hurting you?" Xian demanded, angry.

Juthian shook his head. "No. He is...very kind to me."

"Then?" Xian shook his head, mystified. "Why...why do you cry, Juthian?"

"Because...because," now Juthian looked around him, to be sure no one was listening. "Because I miss you, Master."

"Oh Ju," Xian said, his heart beating faster. He tilted his chin up, wishing desperately that he could kiss him. "But...I am not your Master now."

"I know." Juthian's voice was barely a whisper.

Xian studied him for a moment, longing to put his arms around him and take him home, and then...take him to his bed. He released his hold on Juthian's chin, but found that his hand moved, unbidden, down the boy's body to this waist, resting on his hip. And then, suddenly, he felt an irresistible urge for more intimacy. He bent down and kissed him slowly, longingly.

Juthian, though surprised, and a little alarmed, did not resist, thrilled at his former Master's advances. Xian broke away, his hand dropping to his side.

"I should not have done that," he whispered. "Please forgive me." The Blondie looked around nervously, glad to see that no one appeared to have observed his illicit actions. He was surprised at himself for kissing Juthian; he certainly had not intended to. And yet...he longed to take him. Now that he had tasted the pleasures of sex through Enyu, Xian had not been able to stop thinking about Juthian, wondering what it would be like with the boy.

"But I...I liked it."

"Oh, Ju." Now Xian closed his eyes. What they were doing was completely wrong. Juthian properly belonged to Iason now. And yet...he was tempted to simply seize the boy and take him home. He fought his more barbaric impulses, trying to decide what to do. "I'm going to talk with Iason," he said, finally. "I don't know what he'll say. But I'll see if I can...get you back, Juthian."

Excited, Juthian nodded. "Then...you want me?"

Xian smiled. "Oh yes. I never...stopped wanting you, Ju. But...I was angry."

Juthian bowed his head, ashamed.

"Now, that's enough of that," Xian scolded, gently. "You've been sufficiently punished for that. Don't you agree?"

Smiling, Juthian nodded. "Oh yes. It was...a really thorough punishment."

"Yes. I confess," now Xian fumbled a bit with his words, unaccustomed to having to admit his own errors, "perhaps...I was a bit harsh, Ju."

Juthian, although agreeing with this assertion, wisely chose to remain silent.

For a moment, they contemplated one another, both of them smiling. "Ju...if you come back with me, there's something that I...that you should know."

The boy waited, eyes wide.

Xian hesitated for a moment, looking around again to be sure no one was within earshot. "If you come back," he continued, his voice low and urgent, "then I might want, that is...I am sure that I might demand...intimate favors from you."

His heart beating fast, Juthian stared at his former Master, hardly daring to believe what he was proposing.

"That shocks you, I can see," Xian said, looking a little disappointed.

Juthian swallowed, then nodded. "Yes. I admit I am shocked," he whispered. "But...I am not opposed to it. What I mean to say is...I would very much enjoy...obeying your every command...including those for intimate favors." The boy smiled a little when saying these last few words, finding his former Master's phrasing delightfully quaint.

The Blondie's face lit up at Juthian's reply. "You mean this?"

Juthian nodded.

"Then...say nothing of this...to anyone. I must think about how I can persuade Iason," Xian said, a little worried on this final point.

He knew Iason would be very annoyed at losing a Furniture he had just trained, and he was not at all sure the Blondie would agree to release him. "Now Ju," Xian whispered, pulling him behind a tall display of paddles where they would not be observed. "I want to kiss you again."

Juthian needed no persuading, thrilled when Xian pulled him close, running his hands down his back as he bent down and prodded his mouth open with his tongue. The Blondie's kiss was intoxicating, and the boy's heart was beating so hard he could hear it in his ears. He could feel his Master's hardening erection pressed against his stomach, and he was both alarmed and delighted when Xian took hold of his hand, guiding him to his organ.

Not quite sure what to do, Juthian simply stroked him a little tentatively.

Excited, Xian fumbled with his trousers and released himself, then took Juthian's hand, placing it firmly around his shaft, showing him how he wanted to be stroked.

Thrilled, and yet terrified they would be discovered, Juthian began stimulating the Blondie, who continued to kiss him hungrily, almost wildly.

Xian hardly knew what he was doing, but suddenly he felt he could not stop what he had started. He was so aroused that Juthian's warm hand around his organ was an irresistible stimulus, and within just a few moments, he realized he was going to release. The thrill of knowing they were doing something forbidden, and in a public place, propelled him quickly.

"Oh Ju," he moaned, breaking away. "Keep...keep doing that. I can't stop now." Now he reached down, holding Juthian's hand and increasing the cadence of his strokes. "Good boy. Oh...good boy, Ju!" he whispered these last words, excited, as he felt his release come.

Throwing back his head, he struggled to rein in his strong desire to cry out, unable, however, to keep from gasping as he climaxed, his semen pumping up and dripping down onto both of their hands. He closed his eyes, biting his lip.

Juthian watched his Master with shining eyes. It was a moment he had dreamt of for a long, long time. And suddenly it had happened, in a way he had hardly expected, on a gloomy afternoon when he had gone to the pavilion on a simple errand. And his Master wanted him...was going to try and get him back. Juthian treasured this knowledge, his heart nearly bursting with happiness.

Now Xian opened his eyes, regarding his former pet with an inexplicable expression contorting his features. "My Ju," he said softly.

Juthian smiled. "My Master."

* * *

"It's swelling," Iason said, examining Riki's hand. "And some of this is your blood, Riki," he scolded.

"It's nothing," the mongrel answered, though thoroughly enjoying his Master's attention.

Iason answered this by lifting him up and setting him on the counter next to the bar sink. He turned on the water. "Let's get you cleaned up."

"Good afternoon Master," Juthian said, a little softly, as he approached him. "Welcome back. Can I get you anything?"

"Some ice, Juthian."

"Yes, Master."

"Ouch!" Riki complained, as Iason forced his hand under the water.

The Blondie smiled. "I see. You're the tough mongrel when it's four against one, but when it comes to cleaning your wounds you're just a little boy. Isn't that so?"

Riki ignored this, leaning forward to bury his face in Iason's intoxicatingly exotic-smelling hair. "You smell so fucking good," he averred.

Iason straightened, opening his mouth to reply but was silenced by Riki's demanding kiss. The mongrel pulled him close, opening his thighs and scooting forward to press his erection

against Iason's stomach. He broke away from the kiss and began kissing and nibbling Iason's neck, eliciting gasps from the Blondie.

"Let me fuck you," he whispered in his ear.

Iason shivered at his pet's aggressive manner, enjoying his decidedly erotic thrusting against his stomach.

"Come on," Riki pleaded. "Please?"

"Very well," Iason said, unable to resist the mongrel's seduction. He smiled. "Let's go to the bedroom."

"No. I wanna fuck you right here."

For a moment, the Blondie contemplated refusing him, but found his pet's domineering attitude rather exciting.

Juthian returned with a bowl of ice and a towel.

"Put those down, Juthian. And then you may leave the room. See that we're not disturbed."

"Yes, Master," Juthian murmured, suppressing a smile as he glanced at Riki.

Though he had not been directly addressed, Odi tactfully slipped out the front entrance to be sure no one was admitted into the penthouse for awhile before retreating to his room.

Iason turned back to Riki, who regarded him with unveiled lust. "Get undressed," the mongrel commanded, pulling off his own shirt and tossing it aside. He jumped down from the counter and unzipped his pants, removing them as he watched the Blondie undress.

"You're so fucking gorgeous, Iason," he breathed, his eyes glimmering, as he took in the Blondie's naked form. Distracted by the sound of running water, Riki turned to shut off the faucet, then caught sight of several familiar-looking vials sitting on the counter.

"Is this oil?" he asked, picking one up and shaking it.

"Yes, pet."

"Ooo. I have an idea. Come over here...turn around and put your hands on the counter." Riki then poured a generous amount of oil in his hand, and slowly began applying it to the Blondie's bare ass and thighs.

“Oh yeah. Now...let's try this.” Riki hooked his arm under Jason's thigh, lifting his leg up high. He was delighted with the view, his cock twitching at the site of his Master so exposed. “You're so...you have no idea how fucking hot you look, all slippery and...I love this little hollow here.” Riki traced a finger along the Blondie's inner thigh, his perfectly toned muscles flexing at his touch.

The mongrel held out his hand. “More oil,” he demanded, and Jason poured a generous amount of oil into his hand. This time Riki lubricated himself, groaning from the stimulation. He held out his hand again for more oil, and then reached around and began coating Jason's rigid erection, much to the Blondie's complete delight.

“You like that, don't you?” Riki whispered, sliding his erection between the Blondie's cheeks in a tantalizing manner.

“Oh yes,” Jason admitted, closing his eyes.

“I'm so fucking turned on,” Riki announced. He pressed himself up to Jason's portal, then eased forward, groaning as he sank inside. He looked down, fascinated by the sight of his erection disappearing into the Blondie's depths. Now he began fucking him harder, though continuing to stimulate Jason with his hand. Because they had both released so many times the previous day, the sex lasted longer than usual, despite both of them being wildly aroused.

“Pet,” Jason gasped, thrilled.

“Yeah, you like being fucked, don't you?” Riki purred, biting his neck. “You're such a lovely little deviant. You're Jupiter's naughty boy, aren't you?”

For some reason, these words stimulated the Blondie even more. He clutched the counter, overcome with pleasure.

“You're so close,” Riki whispered, urgently. “Let's come together. Don't hold back when you come. I wanna hear you.”

Thrilled with Riki's whole manner, a side he had never really shown before, Jason began breathing hard, feeling his ascent begin.

“Don't hold back,” Riki commanded again. “Oh...Jason...here we go. Come for me, lover.”

Upon hearing his pet call him "lover" for the first time, Iason suddenly climaxed, obeying his pet's mandate and unleashing a low sex-cry so beautiful and sensual that Riki, who had been just hovering on the edge, immediately ejaculated. "Fuck yeah," he groaned, thrusting a few more times, his eyes closed as he basked in the unbelievable pleasure of the moment.

"Oh fuck," he said, finally, as he collapsed forward onto Iason's back. "That was...like the best fucking sex we've ever had."

Iason did not reply, feeling a bit overcome with the experience.

Riki withdrew, smiling. "I get it. Your Blondie pride won't let you admit that was the best fucking sex you've ever had?"

Now the Blondie turned around, looking down him with such intensity that Riki's smile faded.

"Pet," Iason said, pulling him close. "Have you any idea...what you do to me?"

Riki smiled, closing his eyes as he leaned on his Master's chest.

* * *

"Are you sure this is okay?" Daryl asked, as he slid into the water next to Katze.

Katze smiled. "Positive. Iason said we can use the pools whenever we want."

"Ooo," Daryl smiled. "It's warm."

"Yeah, nice huh? They're both heated."

"I like swimming."

"Oh," Katze whispered, pushing him up against the side of the pool, "we're not going to be doing any swimming. At least not yet." With that, he forced Daryl's mouth open with his tongue, kissing him passionately, his hands sliding down his lover's body to rest on his hips.

Daryl closed his eyes, enjoying the kiss. When Katze broke away to begin kissing his neck, he shivered. "Let's come tonight," he said, softly.

Katze groaned, breaking away. "We can't, love. We can't use those every night. It's too dangerous."

"I don't care. I want to anyway."

Katze shook a finger in Daryl's face. "Naughty boy. Stop tempting me."

"Please? I really want to. And then we won't for a couple of days." Daryl attempted to seduce him by nibbling on his earlobe.

Katze shivered. "Oh, love."

"Please?" Now Daryl's voice lowered to the barest whisper. "I'll pleasure you with my tongue."

The amber-eyed youth groaned at this offer, finding it too tempting to resist. "Oh...fuck...all right. But we can't tomorrow OR the next day."

Daryl, pleased that he'd managed to talk Katze into it, smiled.

"Though...I really should spank you for being so naughty," Katze teased, kissing his nose gently.

Daryl giggled at his threat, desperately hoping Katze would carry it out.

"You find that funny, do you?" Now Katze slid his hands around the boy's ass, squeezing him. "We'll see how humorous you think it is after I've given you a good, hard spanking."

Smiling, the grey-eyed youth answered this by throwing his head back, inviting Katze to explore the tantalizing expanse of his throat.

"Daryl," he said, after a moment. "I've heard a very interesting rumor."

"Yeah?" Daryl's eyes were still closed as he enjoyed Katze's gentle kisses and nibbles.

"Yes. VERY interesting. Although I'm not quite sure I believe it. About Raoul Am and Yui."

Now Daryl opened his eyes, intrigued.

Katze laughed at his expression. "I thought that would interest you."

Daryl blushed, bowing his head.

Katze tilted his chin up with his finger. "Hey. Don't be embarrassed. It's all right. I don't mind that you're attracted to Yui. Although," now he leaned in closer, "if you ever actually did anything with him, I'd probably have to kill him."

Daryl smiled at this.

"AND spank you. Only it wouldn't be a fun spanking."

"I'd never be unfaithful to you, Katze."

He smiled. "I know you wouldn't." Then his expression became serious. "Because...if you did...you'd be in big trouble."

"Oh yeah?" Daryl arched his eyebrows, enjoying Katze's jealousy.

"That's right. No one touches you but me. In fact," now Katze began kissing his neck again, making his way up to his ear, where he whispered, "perhaps I ought to give you a good, preemptive spanking in advance, just to be sure you don't cheat on me."

This elicited another giggle from Daryl, who was rather eager for a spanking.

"You laugh, but I guarantee you, you wouldn't like a real spanking from me, Daryl."

Daryl's smile suddenly faded, and he grew pale.

Katze laughed. "I'm only teasing you, love."

His lover didn't answer, his eyes dilating a bit.

Now Katze became alarmed. "Hey. Daryl. What's wrong?"

"I'm...tired, Katze."

"Fuck. I'm so stupid." Katze immediately picked him up, carrying him up the steps and out of the pool. He set him down, wrapping a towel around him. "Are you okay?" He peered at him, worried. "You don't look good, love. I'm gonna get some help."

Daryl reached out and grabbed his arm. "No, Katze."

"Don't fight me on this," his lover replied, a little angrily. "If I think you need medical attention, you're getting it."

Now Daryl raised his voice, which was unusual for the typically quiet youth. "I said NO, Katze. I don't want to go back to the hospital."

“Dammit, Daryl,” Katze cursed, then pulled him close. “Fuck. Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck!”

“I’ll be okay. I just need...to rest.”

“Of course you do. I’m an idiot.” Katze got up, lifting him easily and carrying him back to their room, completely oblivious to the fact that they were both naked.

Juthian rushed toward them, worried. “Is he okay?”

“I’m fine,” Daryl asserted, rather weakly.

“Call for some medical assistance,” Katze ordered.

“No! I said NO, Katze!” Daryl cried.

“Daryl,” Katze said through gritted teeth, “you’re making me very angry.”

“I don’t fucking care! I’m not going back!”

Juthian hesitated, unsure if he should obey Katze or not.

Katze sighed, exasperated. “All right. But if you don’t seem better in ONE HOUR, I’m calling a medical team, whether you like it or not.”

“Thank you, Katze,” Daryl said, letting his head fall against his chest and closing his eyes.

Katze looked directly at Juthian. “Wait until I call you,” he mouthed.

Juthian nodded, backing away.

Katze carried Daryl into their room and set him down on the bed, scolding him all the while.

“Please, Katze. Stop it.”

“I’m just angry because I love you, Daryl. And I’m fucking worried,” Katze replied, running his hand through his hair. “And I don’t see how it would hurt you to have a professional check you out.”

Daryl didn’t reply right away. Deep in his heart, he didn’t want the medical team to come because he knew something was wrong. And he didn’t want to face up to it. And...he certainly didn’t want to go back to the hospital. He smiled. “I’ll be okay. I promise.”

Sighing, Katze lay down next to him, pulling him close. "I'll hold you to that. Oh Daryl. If...anything ever happened to you...I think I'd go out of my mind."

Daryl closed his eyes, enjoying the warmth of his lover's arms, and fighting back the tears that threatened to spill down his cheeks.

Jupiter's Blondies

Katze brushed Daryl's hair from his eyes, peering at his face.

"Quit staring at me," Daryl snapped, pouting.

Now a small smile tugged at Katze's lips. "Don't tell me what to do, naughty boy. I'll stare at you all fucking day if I feel like it."

"I told you. I'm fine."

"I'll be the judge of that."

Noises from the foyer alerted them both that Iason and Riki had finally returned. Katze leapt up. "I should greet them."

"I will, too," Daryl said, starting to rise.

Katze immediately pushed him back down. "No, you won't. You're not moving."

"Katze!"

"Obey me," Katze warned, his eyes twinkling. "Or I'll punish you, just like I promised."

This threat elicited a small smile from the very pale boy, who suddenly felt a surge of love and longing for the gorgeous, auburn-haired male who pinned him down so firmly.

"Kiss me," he pleaded.

"I'll kiss you," Katze replied softly, "but I'm afraid we can't do what we were planning earlier. Not now."

"But you promised!"

"That was before you practically passed out on me."

"You promised," Daryl repeated, sulking.

Now Katze touched a finger to Daryl's nose. "Hush."

Annoyed, Daryl turned his head away when Katze bent down to kiss him.

“Oh,” Katze laughed. “Now you’re holding out on me?”

Daryl remained silent, looking away.

Katze took hold of his chin and held him firmly as he forced Daryl’s mouth open with his tongue. Although Daryl continued to resist initially, he soon melted from the sweet persuasiveness of his lover’s kiss, who explored him so beautifully and skillfully, gently bringing color back to his pale cheeks.

“Mmm.” Daryl broke away, his eyes shining. “I want to make love, Katze.”

“And I...want to FUCK you,” Katze replied, grinning. “Which reminds me. I never got to tell you what I heard about Raoul and Yui.”

At this, Daryl’s brow furrowed a bit, as he tried to imagine what Raoul and Yui had to do with lovemaking or fucking.

“Raoul,” Katze said, slowly, enjoying the confusion on Daryl’s face, “is going to have Yui restored.”

As the full meaning of this reached Daryl’s consciousness, his eyes clouded over with confusion. “But...he would only do that...if?”

“Exactly. That’s the rumor. Raoul is taking Yui.”

Daryl thought about this for a moment. “Impossible,” he said, finally, shaking his head.

“That’s what I thought. But I heard it from Heiku’s Furniture, Sarius. It seems Heiku is doing the procedure. Actually we must be very careful about keeping this to ourselves. If Jupiter ever finds out what they’re up to, they’ll all be summoned before her, I’m sure of it.”

“An unsanctioned restoration...wouldn’t that be against the General Code?” Daryl asked, thoughtfully.

“Yes. Anyway that’s what I’ve heard. Not that I’ve actually ever read the Code or anything. Don’t you find it interesting that those three are willing to take that kind of risk?”

Daryl nodded.

“Hold on. I’ll be right back.”

Katze used Daryl’s preoccupied state to slip out, but he was immediately stopped by Juthian.

“Are they back? I thought I heard them.”

Juthian nodded. “But they’re...not to be disturbed.”

The unmistakable sounds of coital exploration now reached Katze, and he and Juthian exchanged knowing smiles.

“I see. It seems...they’ve sorted out their differences already.”

“They barely got back before they were at it.” Juthian’s eyes glowed as he imagined a similar scene with Xian.

“I’m dying for a peek,” Katze whispered.

“Katze! You’d better not.”

“I’ll sneak in through the kitchen back door and get a glimpse from there. Come with me. You know you want to.”

“Well,” Juthian hesitated, rather torn between feeling the need to be obedient and his own raging curiosity.

As if deciding the matter for him, Katze pressed a hand to his back, pushing him through the guest wing to the back door to the kitchen; it was rarely used, except by Tai. They both entered there, and found Tai already engaged in his own voyeuristic activities, peeking through the crack in the kitchen door and pumping his rather substantial shaft as he did so.

Juthian started to giggle and Katze quickly held his hand over his mouth. “Quiet,” he whispered in his ear, though he was fighting a similar impulse to laugh.

Tai turned and, upon realizing that his little project was no longer a private endeavor, blushed furiously, fumbling to put his happy toy away.

“It’s okay,” Katze whispered with a grin. “We wanted to have a look ourselves.”

“You can...see everything...right through there,” Tai whispered, still red in the face but a little less embarrassed to know that Katze and Juthian had come on a similar mission.

Katze and Juthian made their way to the door as Tai excused himself, making a hasty exit out the back door. The poor boy had been on the verge of ejaculation when he had been interrupted, and was now desperate for relief. He stepped into the hallway, immediately freeing himself to finish what he had started.

As it happened, timing was decidedly against Tai on that day. Odi happened by chance to come out of his room at that precise moment, heading ostensibly for the balcony to smoke, though privately hoping to get a glimpse himself of the performance in the bar area, rather intrigued by the enticing sounds now emerging from the foyer.

Upon apprehending Tai, he stopped, raising an eyebrow as a grin spread across his face. "Oh my. Please. Don't let me interrupt you."

"Oh," Tai groaned. "Fuck." He was now so close to coming that he didn't know what to do, and for a moment simply leaned against the wall, cock in hand, gritting his teeth.

"Would you like me to help you out?" Odi offered, his dark eyes glimmering seductively.

"Oh shit. Don't...don't tease me," Tai begged.

"I wasn't teasing. If you must know, I've had my eye on you...for quite a while. This seems like the perfect opportunity to...feel you out on that point." Odi smiled at his own humor, his eyes taking in Tai's exposed genitals with unveiled appreciation.

Tai was only able to respond to this with a rather strange gasping sound, as he eyed the handsome bodyguard incredulously.

"I just propositioned you. But I didn't quite catch your answer."

"I...I...oh god. I can't--"

At this, Odi took a step forward, pressing him against the wall with his body as he bent down to kiss the rather surprised, but willing, boy. The dark-haired bodyguard let his hands slide down Tai's body, one hand taking hold of his engorged organ as he continued to kiss him.

Tai made a sort of desperate sound that was lost in the delicious fury of Odi's kiss; in the next instant he had released, semen dripping down Odi's hand and covering the front of Tai's pants.

Odi broke away, smiling. "That was quick."

"I...I usually last longer," Tai protested, embarrassed. "I was just...really ready."

“No need for apologies. That’s the first thing approaching sex I’ve had in a long while. So perhaps...we could try it again sometime?”

“Maybe,” Tai conceded, trembling as he zipped up his pants. He made a move as if to rush away, but Odi grabbed him, staying him.

“Hold on. You’re not just going to run off now, are you? Just come and go?” He raised his eyebrow again, his dark eyes shining.

“Please,” Tai begged. “I’m...I’m so embarrassed. I just wanna go to my room.”

“There’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” Odi replied, though he released him.

Tai immediately bolted, disappearing into his room for a good hour.

In the kitchen, Katze and Juthian were enjoying their view of the decidedly erotic sexual exploits taking place by the bar.

“Holy shit,” Katze breathed. “Iason is fucking gorgeous.”

“So is Riki,” Juthian whispered, admiring the dark mongrel’s perfect form.

“Yeah,” Katze smiled. “He is a cute little punk, isn’t he? Shit. Listen to Iason.”

Iason’s quiet, breathy moans were spine-tingling.

“Master Iason has a very large,” Juthian began, then stopped, feeling suddenly that it was not his place to comment on something so intimate regarding his Master.

“All Blondies do. So I’ve heard.”

“Really?” Juthian digested this information, a little worried. “I bet...I bet that hurts.”

“I wouldn’t know. But Riki’s got the right idea. Supposedly there’s nothing quite like fucking a Blondie. In fact...it’s said they have a special little squeezing trick they do.”

Juthian considered this, falling silent. He felt a little sad knowing that he would never have that opportunity now.

“Speaking of enormous cocks, did you get a look at Tai?” Katze whispered.

Juthian nodded, holding a hand up to his mouth to suppress a giggle.

“I wonder if all Aristians are that huge? Or just him?”

“I would never have guessed,” Juthian admitted. “He looks like a little boy. His expressions, I mean.”

“No shit. Who would have thought he was packing all that.”

“How’s Daryl?”

“Oh,” Katze straightened up. “I think he’s probably okay, but I’m not taking any chances. As soon as they’re done in there, go ahead and call the medical team. He’s gonna be pissed at me, but I don’t care. I want him checked out.”

Juthian nodded.

“In fact...I’d better get back, or he’ll come looking for me.”

“Oh...I think they’re almost done,” Juthian observed, as the noise level from the next room increased.

They both peeked through the door once more to watch the Blondie and his pet come.

“Bloody hell. That was...fucking beautiful.”

“Yeah,” Juthian agreed, a little wistfully.

“Hey. Remind me sometime and I’ll show you some interesting devices I have. You practically won’t even know the difference.” Katze smiled, putting a hand on Juthian’s shoulder.

Juthian shook his head at this, puzzled. “Huh?”

“I’ll explain later. I better go back before Daryl gets out of bed.”

“I’ll call for a medical team.”

Now Katze hesitated. “Wait. Iason will want to know what’s going on. Let me talk to him.” He looked through the crack again and saw that both Iason and Riki were getting dressed. He smiled, now getting a view of Riki’s ass that he hadn’t seen before. “Looks like Riki got a good strapping yesterday.”

Juthian looked, nodding when he saw the rather obvious strap marks that had begun to darken into bruises. “He’s lucky that’s all he got.”

“You’re right. He IS damn lucky. I wanted to discipline him myself, the little brat. In fact...maybe I WILL...sometime when he

least expects it." Now Katze's face grew serious. "I never want to see Iason look like that again."

"He was...pretty upset," Juthian agreed.

"Riki's heading outside for a smoke. And Iason's dressed. He's getting himself some wine--you should go out there and offer to do that for him."

Juthian obediently acted on Katze's suggestion, surprising Iason with his quiet approach.

"Can I get that for you, Master?" he asked, softly.

"Ah. Yes, Juthian. That would be lovely." Iason then went to his favorite chair, sitting down with a small smile at his lips as he reviewed in his mind the incontrovertibly delicious sex he and Riki had just shared.

Now Katze sauntered into the hall.

"Katze. I wanted to talk to you."

"Oh?" Katze tried to hide his impatience; now that he had made up his mind to do so, he wanted the medical team called. Juthian brought Iason his wine and the Blondie took a leisurely sip before continuing.

"Yes. Are you aware that there's a mongrel from the slums attempting to take over your market?"

At this, Katze bristled, putting a hand on his hip. "What's this?"

Iason nodded. "His name is Kei. An acquaintance of Riki's. Although perhaps acquaintance is not quite the right word. Riki didn't seem to have much good to say about him."

"I'll take care of it."

"Please do."

"Iason. I wanted to ask you...may I please call a medical team for Daryl?"

"What? Is he ill?"

"He doesn't look well to me."

"Why didn't you come to me sooner?" Iason asked, a little irritated.

"To be honest...you were...engaged."

A strange look passed over Iason's features as he considered, perhaps seriously for the first time, that what Riki and he did together was no secret at the penthouse. "I see," he said quietly, lowering his eyes. "I suppose that is so. Then...yes, you may call."

Katze gave him a slight bow of gratitude, rushing over to the communications center.

Iason rose. "Is he in his room?"

"Yes," Katze said, looking a little alarmed. "But don't trouble yourself; he'll be quite surprised if you enter."

"When it comes to my household, I'll decide what's best, Katze," Iason replied, a little sharply.

"Yes, Sir." Katze was a bit put off by the rebuff, feeling color rise to his cheeks.

Iason then went to Daryl's room, the door--like every door in the penthouse--immediately opening for him.

Daryl startled. "Master Iason," he said, though a bit weakly.

Iason studied him for a moment. "Katze's right. You don't look well."

"I'm fine," Daryl insisted.

"We'll let the professionals decide that."

"I told him not to call them!"

Now Iason stood, hands on his hips. "Are you raising your voice to me, Daryl?"

"N-n...no, Sir. I'm sorry. I was...I told Katze not to call for a medical team. I'm just...a little upset that he did so anyway."

"It seems to me that he made the right decision. How long have you been feeling ill?"

Daryl looked away, unsure of what to say.

"Answer me," Iason demanded, a little harshly.

Now Katze came into the room, his arms across his chest as he waited for Daryl to reply.

"Just these last couple days."

"Why didn't you tell someone?"

"Because...because I didn't want to go back to the hospital."

At this, Iason released a long sigh. "Such foolishness. You really surprise me, Daryl. Why wouldn't you want to get medical treatment? I doubt there's anything wrong with you that can't be easily fixed."

Katze, though silent, gave Daryl a scolding look, which was returned with a glare.

"In any case, it's not your decision whether you return to the hospital or not. And henceforth if you hide anything from me, you can expect to be punished, Daryl."

"Yes...Master," came the soft whisper.

With that, Iason left the room. Katze continued to stand, staring down at Daryl angrily.

"So you've been feeling bad for a few days?"

The grey-eyed boy refused to reply, turning away. Katze waited until the door hummed shut, then approached his lover, his expression overflowing with reprimands.

Daryl glanced at him, and seeing his look, grew angry. "Fuck off."

Surprised, Katze dropped down on the bed, continuing to stare at him. "What...did you say?" he said, quietly.

"I said fuck off!"

"Daryl. I know you don't mean that. And I know you're pissed at me. That's just too bad. I told you I'd have my way on this."

"But you PROMISED!"

"So I lied. Is this what you're going to do, pout like a baby?"

In response to this, Daryl attempted to punch him in the arm, but Katze easily grabbed his wrist, then took his other and pinned him to the bed, shifting positions to lie on top of him.

"Get off me!"

"Hush. Iason will come back and punish you. Or maybe I'll punish you."

"Dammit, Katze. You fucking prick."

A little surprised at Daryl's anger, not to mention his rather uncharacteristic cursing, Katze continued to pin him down until he stopped struggling.

“There. Are you going to behave now? Or are you going to continue acting like a spoiled brat?”

“Let me go,” he whimpered.

“I’ll let you go when I’m good and ready. But let me tell you something. What Iason said goes for me, too: hide something like this from me again and you WILL be punished.”

At this, Daryl gave a small laugh of contempt. “What gives YOU the right to punish me?”

Katze studied him for a long moment. “You’re acting strangely. That’s how I know something’s wrong. But I’ll tell you what gives me the right. My concern for you.”

“I don’t have to obey you. You’re not my master.”

“Perhaps,” Katze conceded, as he released him and sat up. “That’s true, I’m not your master. But,” now he traced a finger along his cheek, “since you don’t have the sense to take care of yourself, I’m assuming that responsibility. And that means any time you disobey me on that count, you’ll be subject to whatever punishment I see fit.”

“Hmmp,” Daryl snorted, sulking.

“And at the moment I have two punishments in mind: either I shall tickle you, or I shall give you a spanking.”

At this, Daryl smiled.

“So. You do still have a sense of humor.” Katze leaned down and kissed him gently on the lips.

“Please don’t tickle me.”

“No? Then that just leaves the spanking. Which I shall give you once I’ve determined you’re well enough for it.”

Daryl giggled.

“Why do you persist in laughing at my spanking threats? I assure you, you will be most unhappy when I’m finished with your ass.”

Now Daryl fell silent for a moment. “Katze. I’m...sorry.”

“I know. Don’t think that gets you off the hook, though,” Katze smiled.

“I just...have a real bad feeling.”

“And you decided you’d keep it from me? We’re supposed to share stuff like this. Right?”

“I guess.”

Katze leaned closer. “I KNOW. I wouldn’t hide something like this from you.”

“But...I’m just afraid....”

“What are you afraid of? Tanagura Med is the best fucking hospital in the sector and you know it. You’re being stupid, Daryl, and I don’t mind telling you. Iason’s right. There’s nothing wrong with you they can’t fix, unless you refuse to get treated like some dumbass.”

Now Daryl began to tear up.

“Hey.” Katze bent down to kiss his tear. “All right. I didn’t mean that. You’re not a dumbass...you’re just very...NAUGHTY.”

“I said mean things to you.”

Katze shrugged. “I’ve got thick skin. Forget it.”

“If anything happens...I just want you to know...how much I love you.”

Now Katze put a hand over his mouth. “Hush with that. I know you love me. I love you, too, more than fucking anything. But nothing’s going to happen.”

“But--”

“I said HUSH.”

The door hummed open, and Iason walked in, followed by the medical team. Katze backed out of the way as they examined him with a scanner.

“Hmmm.” Sho, one of the technicians, studied the readout with concern.

“What is it?” Katze asked.

“His kidney function doesn’t look so good. We can get him fixed up for tonight but,” now he turned to look at Iason, “you’d better think about getting him a new one. As soon as possible.”

“Very well,” Iason replied. “I’ll contact Heiku over at Reconstruction.”

“He’s good.”

The other technician, Kin, laughed. "Good? He's the best there is."

"Yeah. If you can get Heiku, that's great."

Iason narrowed his eyes at this and then walked off without another word.

"Idiot. Of course he can GET Heiku. That's Iason Mink, dumbass."

"Oh," Sho said, a little sheepishly. "Right."

"Hey. Who is that Blondie he's talking to in there? The one in leather?"

"Fuck if I know."

"So what are you going to do for him now?" Katze demanded.

"We'll give him a Nephroalysis unit," Sho said. "After he's had that on for a few hours he'll be okay for awhile."

"That thing fucking hurts," Daryl complained. "They kept torturing me with it at the hospital."

"You're lucky you're still alive," Kin scolded him. "So don't be complaining about a little pain."

Now Sho stared at Daryl for a moment. "When were you at the hospital?"

"Just a bit over a week ago," Katze answered.

"You mean they had you on a unit at the hospital and didn't discharge you with one?"

At this, Daryl looked a bit guilty, turning away to avoid Katze's gaze.

"Daryl?"

"I hated the thing," Daryl replied, finally.

"What are you saying?"

"I hacked into the computer and changed the discharge order."

At this, Sho, Kin and Katze stared at him in disbelief.

"You did what?" Sho shook his head.

Now Katze was visibly upset. "You'd better fucking be kidding me."

"Please don't tell Master Iason," Daryl pleaded, avoiding Katze's gaze to turn to Sho.

Sho shrugged. "That's none of my concern. Although technically whoever was working that station ought to be fired." He shook his head. "I don't know how the hell you managed to get into the system. Now, open that towel there so I can put this on you."

Katze watched the implantation of the unit on Daryl's abdomen impassively, unmoved when Daryl began whimpering. "Please make them stop," he begged.

"Do you mean to tell me you deliberately changed those orders just to avoid a little pain?" Katze demanded, hands across his chest.

"It hurts A LOT," Daryl protested.

Katze shook his head at this, furious.

"I thought he looked sexy in that little get-up," Kin continued.

"Who? That Blondie?" Sho scowled at this.

"Are you jealous?" Kin teased.

"In your dreams, Kin."

"What are you talking about?" Katze demanded.

"That Blondie in the great hall with Iason," Kin replied, lowering his voice to add, "he has a whip."

Katze peeked out the door, and spying Omaki, nodded. "That's Omaki Ghan."

"Oh really? THAT'S Omaki Ghan?" Kin grinned at this. "Ooo...gorgeous. Maybe I'll have to make a little trip to the Taming Tower."

"Oh right. Like you could stand even one minute of discipline, ya wimp," Sho replied.

"Who says I'd be taking it?"

"Well you wouldn't be giving it...at least not to me."

"Don't flatter yourself. I'd sooner sleep with your sister."

"Don't fucking talk about my sister!" Sho snapped.

Kin laughed at this. "Ooo...now I finally know the Mighty Sho's weak spot. His pretty little sister."

"I said don't talk about her!"

Now Daryl began crying, tears spilling down his cheeks.

"How much longer will this take?" Katze asked, his heart now softening to see Daryl in such pain.

“He’s almost there,” Kin replied, looking at the readout. “Hang in there, kid. I know it’s painful but it only takes a few minutes and then you’ll be all set for a day or so.”

Now Daryl reached out for Katze, who immediately took his hand. “You’re almost finished, love,” he whispered.

“The pain gets worse right toward the end,” Sho warned.

Now Daryl began crying out, gripping Katze’s hand tightly. His cries changed to screams.

“Almost there,” Kin encouraged.

“Yeah. That’s it.” Sho turned the unit off, detaching it quickly. Blood seeped from the points of implantation, and the technician quickly sprayed a bit of Accelerator on it to close the wounds, eliciting another howl from Daryl.

“Finished.”

Now Daryl closed his eyes, suddenly feeling tired again.

“Are you sure he’s okay?”

“Yeah. The unit also delivers a mild opiate. Very mild--his kidney can’t take anything too strong. He probably couldn’t feel it before, but now that we’re through he should start to feel better--or at least sleepy. He needs to rest.”

Katze nodded, sitting down on the bed next to Daryl. “I’ll make sure he does.” He looked down at his lover, suddenly feeling sympathy for him, despite his earlier anger and annoyance. Now that he had witnessed how painful the procedure was, he could understand why Daryl would go to some lengths to avoid it. And he felt anxious knowing that he would have to undergo more pain. He brushed Daryl’s tears from his face, worried.

* * *

“You’re doing it again.”

Askel held out his hands, his mouth dropping open. “What? I’m just fucking sitting here.”

“No, you’re making that sound.”

“I’m not making any fucking sound!”

“You are. Like this.” Freyn demonstrated with his teeth, grinding them together.

“I don’t sound like that!” Askel protested.

“Yes, you do. And you make that same sound when you’re sleeping, only a lot louder.”

“Then fucking get your own room! You don’t have to sleep with me, you know. We’re not eight anymore.”

“But,” Freyn said after a pause, “I can’t sleep without you.”

“Then quit complaining about the sounds I make!”

“But it’s annoying as hell.”

At this Askel sighed, exasperated. “Hey. Give me a smoke.”

“Odi says we’re not supposed to smoke out here anymore, now that Iason’s back.”

“Fuck that. I’m not sitting out here all day without a bloody smoke! He’s probably going to stay home all day.”

“Hey. I wonder if they’re done in there. It’s suddenly quiet.”

The brothers sat for a moment, listening. “I can hear Iason’s voice...and Katze.”

“They’re done, then,” Freyn replied.

“Fucking give me a smoke already.”

“Hold up.” Freyn straightened up, nodding toward a very strangely dressed Blondie who was heading toward them, trailed by a small boy, who was looking back at the statue of Jupiter at the end of the hall.

“That’s Omaki Ghan and his little pet,” Askel whispered.

“Please?” Aki pleaded. “I wanna climb on the statue!”

“No, Aki. Not now.”

Aki pouted at this, staring darkly at the bodyguards as though they were to blame.

“I’m here to see Iason Mink.” Omaki announced his presence by halting and putting one hand on his hip. The Blondie was dressed head to toe in skin-tight dark leather, a whip hanging from his belt. His hair, the color of rich gold, was loose and wild, framing his slender but well-formed physique. He wore a small hoop earring on one of his ears, and a chain necklace bearing a strange symbol.

“Yes Sir. That is...they had asked not to be disturbed some time ago,” Freyn began.

“We think they’re done but we’re not sure.”

At this, Freyn jabbed his brother in the side with his elbow.

“Bloody hell!” Askel swore. “Whatdya do that for?”

“Hush, you moron.”

Omaki smiled, perfectly aware of what they were talking about.

“I see. So the mongrel’s back, then?”

“I have to use the bathroom,” Aki announced.

“Oh. Well...in that case,” Freyn flipped open his communicator.

“Odi said we’re supposed to stop calling him on that,” Askel pointed out.

“Like I don’t know that? Idiot. What else am I supposed to do?”

Askel shrugged. “I’m just saying.”

Freyn rolled his eyes, punching in Odi’s codes. “Yeah. I know,” he replied to Odi’s reprimand. “But Omaki Ghan’s here. Okay to let him in?”

“They’re finished. Let me alert Iason first. Then I’ll let you in.” Odi cut the transmission. Although he forgave Freyn on this occasion, he had become rather annoyed at the constant calls from the brothers, typically to settle some ridiculous dispute between them, like which one of them was better looking or how fast a C9000 Lightbender could go (the answer being 9000 Cepaks), or--most recently--which of the brothers had a bigger penis, and he had forbade either of them to call him except in an emergency.

After a brief moment, the door hummed open, and Odi let the Blondie and the boy in. He looked down the hall. “There’s a medical team that’s coming, too. I just found out.”

“What for?” Askel wondered.

“Daryl’s ill.”

Omaki and Aki stepped inside. The boy immediately began holding himself, jumping up and down. “I really have to go,” he whined.

“That’s why I told you to go before we left,” Omaki chided. “Why didn’t you obey me?”

“I was too excited to go then.”

Omaki sighed.

“Omaki.” Iason’s greeting distracted him from his annoyance, and he nodded at the beautiful Blondie, who was sitting his favorite chair by the window, his legs elegantly crossed.

“Iason. Forgive me but, it seems Aki is in urgent need of some relief.”

“Juthian,” Iason commanded, and the youth immediately stepped forward to show Aki the way to the bath hall. The Blondie smiled as the boy walked awkwardly down the hall, obviously quite uncomfortable. “He lacks some rather basic training,” he observed.

“Don’t judge him by that. He was...excited about coming here. He can’t relieve himself when he’s excited. And he’s walking like that partly because I had to spank him earlier.”

“Oh? And what did he do this time?”

Omaki smiled. “He...disobeyed me and was loitering around the brothel. Then he lied to me about it.”

“I see. Quite the naughty boy, then.”

Now Omaki grew serious. “Oh no. Not really. That is, as he’s gotten a bit older he’s starting to develop more of a will of his own, it’s true. But in general he’s a good boy, Iason. I’m sure he would mind you...most of the time.”

“I haven’t made up my mind yet, if that’s what you’re getting at.”

“No pressure. That’s not why I’ve come.”

“Can I offer you a drink, Omaki?”

“I’m not one to refuse a good drink. I’ll take scotch.”

Iason rose to get the drink, but at that moment the medical team arrived. “Excuse me for a moment,” he said, nodding to Omaki. “Sit down. Make yourself comfortable.” The Blondie led the team to Daryl’s room and then returned to find Omaki still standing in the foyer.

“Sit down, I told you.”

“Iason. I need to talk to you...somewhere privately. That is...some place where we can be absolutely certain we’re not being overheard.”

Iason studied him for a moment, and the look in Omaki’s eyes conveyed the urgency of his request and the full meaning behind his words. “Then,” he said, softly, “let me get you a drink and we’ll go up to the Observatory.”

Omaki nodded, turning as he heard Aki shouting about feeding the fish. “He’s rather...taken with your fishpond,” he apologized.

The Blondie smiled. “No need for apologies, there. He’s like any other boy, I imagine.” He handed him the scotch and they walked down corridor to the hidden door, then made their way up the spiral staircase to the Observatory.

“Are you sure we’re safe here?” Omaki asked, in a low voice.

“I think so. Almost no one even knows about this place. It’s not even in the blueprints for the penthouse.”

“Then, I have something rather interesting to tell you.” He leaned closer, instinctively whispering. “I have Yousi’s logs.”

For a moment, Iason simply stood there as this information penetrated his consciousness. “You...have them?”

Quietly, the Blondie pulled out a small, flat book from his pocket, holding it up with a smile. He opened to the first page, and held up the book so Iason could read the message from Yousi.

Iason’s eyes quickly passed over the words, though he could hardly believe what he read. He shook his head.

Omaki smiled at his amazement. “It’s like he’s alive again, coming at you through the page, isn’t it?” He felt a twinge of sadness when he thought about what Jupiter had done to the brave, beautiful Blondie, whose intellect had once been the envy of all the Elite.

For a long moment, Omaki and Iason simply gazed at one another, in that moment bound together by the memory of their old friend, and by the knowledge of what they now possessed.

“Have you read it?” Iason asked.

Omaki nodded. "But it's beyond me, to be honest. Although you might understand it. That is, I understand the basic idea of what he's suggesting, but I confess all that technical computer jargon is way out of my league." He smiled. "My area of expertise lies in more earthy domains."

"What do you suggest we do?"

"I'm giving this to you, Iason. I trust your judgment as to the next course of action. Although perhaps we ought to do what he suggests and just burn the thing."

Iason shook his head. "No."

"I leave it to you, then. I'll follow your lead, whatever you decide. Yousi believed in you, too."

"Thank you, Omaki."

Omaki placed his hand on Iason's shoulder, and Iason did likewise, and for a long moment they exchanged a look of understanding and trust.

Then a sly grin crept onto Omaki's face. "So you have your pet back, I hear? And when, might I ask, are you going to show him at a Party, Iason?"

Iason pulled away, frowning. "I hadn't thought about it."

"Well, you should. But of course you know this. Your persistence in keeping him all to yourself is partly what drives the rumors about you two. Have him pair with some other pretty pet."

"Yes, yes." Iason was a little annoyed at being berated, having heard similar remarks from Raoul on numerous occasions. Yet he found that he had no desire whatsoever to show off Riki--certainly not to have him pair with another pet--preferring to keep the mongrel's charms for his own private enjoyment.

Omaki laughed softly, reading Iason's thoughts as if they had been clearly written on his face. "I suppose I understand how you feel. I'm not in a hurry to show my Enyu, either."

"Are you pleased with him, then?" Iason asked, glad for the shift in the conversation.

"Oh...Iason." Omaki shook his head, then laughed. "Oh my, yes. He's...perfect."

The Blondie smiled slightly at this, wondering what sort of effect the new pet had on Omaki's untoward desires toward Aki.

The tiny, high-pitched voice of the boy suddenly drew closer, as Aki went searching through the penthouse for his Master. Juthian tried to stay him, but when Aki found the "secret" door open at the end of the great hall, he dashed toward it, excited. "A secret passageway!" he yelled.

"It's not secret anymore," Juthian remarked, smiling.

"Can I climb the curly stairs?" Aki pleaded.

"You'd better not."

"But I want to!" Aki pouted.

"No, we'd better wait for your Master...and Master Iason."

"But they're probably up there! Master!" Aki called up the stairs.

"Hush," Juthian scolded him. "If they've gone up there, they probably don't want to be disturbed."

At this, Aki looked disappointed. "Well does he have any slides then?"

Juthian shook his head. "No. Not that I know of."

"Not even ONE slide?" Aki asked, incredulously.

Now the sound of the Blondies coming down the stairs diverted the boy's attention again. "Can I climb up the stairs?" he yelled, as Omaki emerged.

"No, Aki. We're going home now."

"But I WANT TO." Aki stomped his foot, angry.

In a swift, firm movement, Omaki grabbed hold of Aki's arm, swatting his behind once with a rather hard spank, which was immediately felt on the boy's still sore bottom.

"Ow!" Aki complained, rubbing himself.

"Behave. If I tell you no, it means no."

The boy sulked at this, but fell silent, obeying his Master.

Iason smiled at this interchange, finding the boy's naughty manner and pouting rather endearing. He had privately almost made up his mind to be Aki's Guardian, though he wanted to check a few points in the Code before he made his final decision. More

than anything, he wondered how Riki would react to having the boy around, and whether having to serve as an example would in any way modify or improve the mongrel's own behavior.

Omaki nodded to him as he led Aki away. "We'll be...in touch," he said, smiling.

Riki strolled into the hall, hands in his pockets, as Omaki left. "What the fuck's going on? All those medical people and...Omaki? And what was all the screaming?"

"They were here for Daryl. Ah. That reminds me. Be a good pet, Riki, and bring me a drink. I need to make a call."

Riki scowled at this order, ready to object, but Juthian immediately rushed past him to the bar. "I'll get it."

"What's wrong with Daryl?" Riki demanded.

Iason sat down at the terminal, already dialing the number to Heiku. "He's...his kidney is insufficient."

"What the fuck does that mean?"

When Iason ignored him, Riki made for Daryl's room to find out what was going on.

Heiku immediately picked up, sounding a bit surprised to hear from him.

"Iason. My. How's that plate working out. No problems, I trust?"

"No, it merged flawlessly. That's not why I've called. I have a favor to ask you."

"I'm all ears."

"It's my Furniture, Daryl. He needs a new kidney. Can you fit him in?"

"How soon?"

"As soon as possible."

"Then," Heiku paused for a moment, pulling up his schedule on his computer, "I'll squeeze him in tomorrow. How does that sound? At 8:01 in the morning?"

"8:01? What do you mean 8:01?"

"Is there a problem with that time?" Heiku asked, suppressing a smile.

When Iason failed to respond, he laughed.

“Oh very well. 8:00 then. I suppose you’d consider that a proper time. Although why is it that people always meet on the hour or the half hour? Why not 8:01?”

“8:00 is perfect,” Iason replied, ignoring his teasing.

“And...let’s see, will you be wanting any additional modifications performed?”

Iason fell silent for a moment, perplexed. “I’m not following you.”

“Such as restoration, perhaps?”

“Why would I request such a thing?” Iason demanded.

“Oh...I only meant...you know, since Raoul called me,” Heiku hinted.

“What?”

“Are you Independent?”

Puzzled, Iason looked at his channel log. “No. Why do you ask?”

“Let me call you right back.” Heiku suddenly disconnected, leaving Iason staring at the blank screen in confusion.

Almost immediately, the unit sounded a call alert, and Iason answered it. Heiku came up full-screen, smiling.

“Sorry about that. I just wanted to be cautious.”

Iason shook his head. “You’ve completely lost me, Heiku.”

“I only meant...surely you know about Raoul?”

“Heiku,” Iason said, a little impatiently. “Out with it. Whatever you’re dancing around.”

“All right then. Raoul came to me to have his Furniture restored.”

Iason had no reply to this, sorting out the implications in his mind.

“I’ve surprised you, then?”

“Yes,” Iason admitted. “In fact...I don’t quite believe it.”

“Do you think I’d lie to you, Iason?” Now Heiku looked serious. “I quite assure you it’s true. I’m taking some risk myself to do the procedure. All this is confidential, by the way.”

“Then you’re...you’re going to do it?”

“Tomorrow, in fact.”

“But,” Iason shook his head. “Why would Raoul do such a thing?”

“Oh come on, Iason. You know perfectly well why.”

“No. I can’t believe it. Not Raoul. He’s been so vocal....” Iason trailed off, suddenly realizing he was speaking his thoughts aloud.

“I assume you mean about you and your mongrel pet,” Heiku replied, smiling. “Come now, Iason. Don’t look so surprised. Everyone knows about that. You and Raoul have been the best gossip going for the past fifteen years straight--since the Academy. Everyone knows you take your pet, and everyone knows Raoul gives you grief over it.”

A bit surprised at this, Iason fell silent again.

“Don’t look so shocked. I’m sure Jupiter knows, too. But you’re her golden boy, aren’t you?” Ignoring this, Iason lowered his eyes for a moment before replying. “You...you’re doing this procedure tomorrow?”

“Yes. As a matter of fact,” he said with a grin, “right after I finish with your Daryl. You’ll probably bump heads in the lobby.”

Iason, suspecting this coincidence to have been deliberate on Heiku’s part, felt a little irritated, but he could hardly berate the Blondie after he had so graciously agreed to fit Daryl into his schedule.

“Then, I’m in your debt, Heiku. We’ll see you tomorrow at 8:00 sharp.”

Heiku nodded, cutting off the transmission just as a smile pulled at his lips.

For a long moment, Iason just stared at the computer screen, trying to make sense of the information he’d just garnered from Heiku. He suddenly recalled the marks on Raoul’s throat he’d noticed a few days before and smiled, shaking his head. “Raoul,” he whispered.

Now Riki came back into the hall, having been rebuffed by Katze, who wanted Daryl to rest. "He doesn't look so good," he commented, worried.

"He'll be fine. I've made arrangements for him to have a kidney transplant tomorrow."

"Oh. That's....good." A little relieved with this news, Riki now shifted gears. "Iason...can I PLEASE have one extra smoke today?"

"No, pet." Iason rose, taking his wine and heading for the library.

"Dammit, Iason," he muttered, annoyed.

The Blondie stopped, then turned to look back at him, one hand on his hip. "What did you say?"

Riki sighed. "Come on. PLEASE....I'll suck you off extra specially good later."

"I should hope you'd do that anyway," came the silky-smooth reply.

"Please? I'll let you spank me," he offered, desperate.

"You'll let me spank you?" Iason replied, amused. "And what makes you think I can't just spank you because it suits me?"

At this Riki fell silent, leaning against the doorframe to the library as he watched Iason select a book and sit down in a chair. "But I...really REALLY need one."

"I said no, Riki," Iason said sharply, and then added, mimicking what he had overhead Omaki said to Aki, "when I say no, it means no."

Riki sighed, now balancing his feet up on the doorframe so that he was suspended in midair.

"Stop doing that. You'll get dirt on the doorframe."

"My feet aren't dirty."

"Riki," Iason sighed, putting his spectacles on.

At this, the mongrel immediately jumped down, approaching him with a grin. "Oh yeah. Oh fuck yeah."

Iason looked up, puzzled, his brow furrowing.

Riki bit his knuckle, grinning. "Iason...you look so cute in those."

The Blondie gave a slight laugh at this, opening a ponderously big book.

Now Riki moved behind him, lifting his hair to kiss the back of his neck. "What are you reading?"

"The General Code."

Riki snorted at that. "I bet you come fast reading that." He peered down at the page Iason had opened. "Guardianship. Why are you reading that?"

Iason shivered a little when Riki began kissing his neck, despite having come just an hour or so before. "Because I'm considering taking in Aki as a Charge."

Riki let Iason's hair fall, moving around to the front of the chair, and crouching down there. "Seriously?"

"Yes."

"What does that mean exactly?"

"It means I'd be responsible for his wellbeing until he's of age."

"How long would that be?"

"Until he's twelve. Four years."

"But," now Riki began tracing a line up Iason's leg with his finger, "why do you want to do that? I thought he was Omaki's pet?"

"He's too young to be a pet. Jupiter insists he be removed from Omaki's household."

"That bitch."

"Riki," Iason scolded, although privately amused at the mongrel's remark.

Now Riki slid his hand under Iason's legs, so that his hand was sandwiched between his thighs. "Ooo...you're warm here."

Suddenly beset upon by an erection, Iason was forced to uncross his legs, and Riki delighted in his achievement, teasing him by running his hands up and down his thighs. "You're turned on again already? Wanna fuck me this time?"

For a moment Iason hesitated, but Riki was looking up at him so seductively he was suddenly seized with a strong desire to take his pet, right there. He closed the book with a thud, slamming it down on the table. "Take off your pants," he commanded.

Riki grinned, standing up to unzip himself slowly. "And if I give you what you want, will you give me what I want?"

"You're not getting any more smokes, Riki."

"Fuck!" Now Riki's hands moved to his hips, and he glared down at the Blondie. "Then you're not getting any of THIS."

"Ohhh," Iason laughed brokenly. "How dare you refuse me, pet." He reached out and proceeded to undress the mongrel, who fought him the whole way, hitting his back with his fists.

"Katze!" the Blondie called out. Within moments, the auburn-haired youth came running in the room, taking in the situation with surprise. "It seems Riki has decided to resist me. Help me undress him and then give him a good taming."

"What!" Riki cried.

Katze tried hard to repress a smile at this, secretly pleased with the opportunity to punish Riki, who he was still annoyed at for hurting Iason.

"Stop struggling," Katze said, sharply. "You'll only make it worse for you."

"Fuck you, you prickless pervert!"

Katze responded to this by delivering a stinging strike to Riki's face, privately wondering what had set the mongrel off so soon after their earlier rendezvous the bar. He turned to Iason. "I don't have a taming stick."

Iason answered this by whipping out his own taming stick, a beautiful red and black stick with an elaborate design that momentarily distracted Katze. Riki managed to get in a solid punch to his face, for a moment blinding him from the white light of impact.

As he staggered from the blow, Iason forced Riki up against the wall, holding his hands over his head. "Stop it, Riki," he hissed, now rather angry.

"Fuck you!"

"Katze. Tame him."

Katze needed no persuading, now rather pissed off at Riki on multiple counts, his face still burning from the punch. He let the

taming stick fly, sending punishing strike after strike on the mongrel's bottom and thighs, until finally Riki stopped resisting and began pleading for a cessation to the punishment.

"I'll be good now," he whispered, struggling to keep from crying, as he was desperate for Katze not to have the satisfaction of seeing his tears.

"Enough."

Katze backed away when Iason issued this command, handing the Blondie the taming stick, sweat dripping from his forehead from his exertions.

"You may go now, Katze."

The punished pet, now rather out of spirits, waited for this Master's next commands without resisting.

Iason was perplexed. He released his arms from the wall, turning Riki around to look at him. "Why did you resist me, Riki?"

Riki sighed, shaking his head. "All I wanted...was one lousy smoke."

"Pet," Iason whispered, tilting his chin up to force his gaze. "When will you learn to obey me?"

Before Riki could reply, Juthian came to the door. "Excuse me, Master Iason. But...Sir Xian is here to see you." Juthian was so excited he could hardly speak, his heart pounding.

Iason sighed. "Why don't we just have the Tanagura Freeway redirected through the penthouse," he replied, irritated.

Riki laughed at this. "That was...funny, Iason."

Now the Blondie smiled, glad to see his pet looking happier. He reached into his pocket and opened a silver case, removing one cigarette and holding it out between his fingers. "This one time only, Riki, you may have one additional smoke. But this is the ONLY time I will grant you this request. Next time you try something like this, I will punish you even more severely. Understood?"

The mongrel's eyes shone with excitement and love. "Fuck yes!" He grabbed the smoke and then, rather impulsively, reached up and kissed Iason's cheek. "I love you forever," he announced,

dashing off, completely naked, his ass bearing the marks of his recent discipline.

Iason started to object but then smiled, watching him go, his heart bursting with love for his wayward pet. He suddenly realized that he had not yet put Riki's pet ring on him, and he wondered how the mongrel would react when he did so.

He went into the great hall, removing his spectacles as his gaze drifted to Xian Sami, who stood in the foyer uncertainly, looking decidedly anxious.

"Xian. Oh," now Iason had a thought, remembering his promise to Xian, that the Blondie could take Enyu whenever he choose. "I'm sorry, Xian. I made a promise to you I cannot keep. I've given Enyu to Omaki Ghan."

A strange look passed over Xian's features, and he shook his head. "That's not why I've come."

"Juthian," Iason said, turning to the boy who seemed rather eager to attend him, "Get Sir Xian a," the Blondie paused, trying to remember, "Cognac? Ambrosia?"

"Yes," Xian smiled, pleased that Iason had remembered.

"Yes, Master Iason."

As he passed Xian in the foyer, the Blondie and boy exchanged a look, much like the look that had passed between them when Juthian had answered the door and found his former Master standing there, staring down at him.

"Master," Juthian had said, and then, catching himself, added, "Xian."

"Ju."

For a long moment, they had stared at one another, both of them overcome with emotions and the magnitude of what they had shared earlier that day at the pavilion.

"Is Master Iason in?"

Juthian nodded, unable to speak.

"Then, let me see him. I've come to talk to him." Xian smiled, making his meaning clear.

Excited, Juthian immediately dashed to the library, hoping that the Blondie was finished disciplining his pet, a project that everyone in the household had heard. When Riki came dashing out, completely naked, he smiled, glad to see the pet looking so cheerful after what sounded like a nasty bit of punishment, but more than that--excited that Master Iason was available to speak to his former Master.

Now his hands trembled as he poured a cognac for Xian, whose fingers brushed his as he took the glass from him, sending shivers down his back.

"Come in," Iason sighed, feeling suddenly rather tired from the excitement of the day.

"I'm sorry to disturb you," Xian said, noting the Blondie's mood with concern. The last thing he wanted to do was make his proposal when Iason was feeling annoyed.

"Don't mind me," Iason replied, smiling to reassure him. "Now. Come sit down and tell me why you've come to me."

Xian took a sip of his cognac as he sat, trying to muster up his courage. "You may not like what I have to say."

Now the Blondie studied him, decidedly unenthusiastic about the way the conversation was starting out.

"It's about...Juthian."

Now Iason turned to Juthian, who was watching this conversation anxiously. "Juthian. Please excuse yourself. We're not to be disturbed."

Disappointed, but not surprised, Juthian slipped away, finding a place just outside the hall where he could still eavesdrop.

"Go on."

Xian took a deep breath. "I was...hasty when I agreed to give him to you. In fact, I'm not sure how to tell you this, but," he leaned closer, his voice lowering, "I've developed an attachment to him. I've come to ask you...no, to beg you...to let me have him back."

Iason shook his head in disbelief. First Omaki and Aki, then Raoul and Yui...and now Xian and Juthian? It seemed he was not alone in his perversions, and while he was a bit surprised at this,

another thought was starting to form in his mind. All four of them...Omaki, Raoul, Xian, and Iason, had reason to challenge Jupiter. Four Blondies--five, if he counted Heiku, who was risking so much in performing Yui's restoration--five Blondies who had been bred to protect Jupiter, now were united in their desires to pursue behaviors forbidden to them by Jupiter's laws.

The Blondie's silence worried Xian. "I know you're angry. You've just trained him. I'd be in your debt, Iason. I'd pay you...whatever you ask."

"Do you realize how dangerous it is to come to me with this information?" Iason said, sharply.

"But...I thought," Xian began, then faltered.

"And yet you're willing to take that risk?"

"Yes."

For a long moment, Iason studied him, then finally set his wine glass down. "I will give Juthian back to you. But I shall consider you in my debt, Xian, and I will call upon you for your loyalty."

"My...loyalty?" Xian shook his head. "Of course. You have it. As I said. Whatever you want, Iason. Then...then I can take Juthian home?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"If it pleases you."

At this, Xian drained his cognac, setting his glass down and then rising. "Then...I'll take my leave. Thank you, Iason."

The Blondie nodded slightly. "Juthian," he called.

The boy came running into the hall, looking first at Xian and then at Iason.

"You're going home with Xian. He will be your Master again, from now on."

The joy on the boy's face was so transparent, Iason wondered why he had never noticed the attachment before.

"Come, Juthian." Xian put his hand on the boy's shoulder, leading him from the penthouse, anxious to get the boy home and into his bed.

“Goodbye, Sir Iason,” Ju said, over his shoulder, smiling.

“Juthian,” Iason nodded. He was, in truth, a little sorry to see the boy go. He had been a perfect Furniture, and now he would have to go through the trouble of training another young boy. Yet this new development--this revealed relationship between Xian and Juthian--was, at the very least, intriguing. For a long time he sat in the great hall, pondering the events of the day, what he had learned about Raoul and Yui, and the surprising turn of events with the appearance of Yousi’s logs. He reached into his pocket to retrieve the small book and, putting his spectacles back on, began to read.

Stepping out of the penthouse, Xian walked quickly, and Juthian struggled to keep up with his pace. As soon as they reached the elevator and were safely inside, he turned, pushing Juthian against the elevator wall and kissing him wildly. “Ju,” he moaned. “I’m so ready for you.”

“Here, Master?” Juthian replied, a little nervously.

“No. This time I want to do things properly. I want to take you to my bed.”

At these words, Juthian began involuntarily to tremble. Xian immediately picked up on this, pulling him close. “You’re afraid, aren’t you?”

“A little,” Juthian admitted.

“I’ll go slow.”

Juthian nodded, excited, his head pressed against Xian’s chest where he could hear the Blondie’s equally accelerated heartbeat. He could hardly believe what was happening and what was yet to come that very day. He closed his eyes, happy beyond his wildest dreams. His Master had come to bring him home.

* * *

Raoul opened his eyes, staring at the tiny ball of fur that was curled up on his chest. “You,” he said, his voice thick from sleep.

Yui then woke up, giggling when he saw the kitten sleeping on his master’s chest. “He likes you.”

“Hmph.”

“Do you want me to take him?”

“He’s warm,” Raoul noted, as Yui picked him up.

“He’s so cute,” Yui said happily. “What should we name him?”

“Does he need a name?”

“Of course he needs a name,” Yui laughed.

“Then...I’ll leave it up to you.”

“But I can’t think of one.”

“Once again, you’re failing in your kitten duties. I warned you, I shall have to punish you, I think.”

“No! Don’t punish me,” Yui cried, grinning.

“Yes. I must.”

“What are you going to do to me?”

Raoul took the kitten, which by then was wide awake, and tossed him to the floor, then pinned Yui to the bed. “I shall fuck you repeatedly. But after I take a shower.”

“But...I’m a little sore,” Yui protested.

“Are you defying me? Raoul demanded.

“No, Master,” came the suddenly meek reply.

“Good. Because today’s our last chance for some hardcore fornication before your procedure.” He kissed Yui’s throat and then nibbled on his earlobe. “But I promise to be gentle,” he whispered in his ear.

Yui, who really was rather sore, was actually dreading more penetration, however gentle. But he was also thrilled to be a day away from his restoration, and he was certainly willing to endure whatever his Master wanted.

Now Raoul, who had been only teasing about taking Yui repeatedly, discovered that the mere act of lying atop him and kissing his neck aroused him to the point that he desired consummation.

“Come with me.” He rose, holding out a hand to Yui, who took it and followed him to the bath hall, where they both freshened up, brushing their teeth and passing water in the same space in the intimate, accepting way only lovers do. Raoul punched in the

shower controls and the water immediately began its perfect spray, the temperature exactly right. Then Raoul led Yui inside, where he pushed him up against the shower wall and began kissing him, at first gently and then with greater urgency.

“Yui,” he whispered, fondling the hollow in the boy’s pelvis where soon something else would be waiting, “I want to hear you cry out your passion.”

“Yes, Master,” Yui stammered, not sure what else to say.

“Soon. Then I will hear you...and see your face.” Now Raoul bit the side of Yui’s throat, eliciting a gasp of surprise.

Raoul smiled as he pulled away. “You’re so untouched.” He bent closer, resting his forehead on Yui’s. “But I intend to violate you completely.” As if to emphasize this point, Raoul slid his hand down between Yui’s legs, suggestively inserting a finger.

Yui winced, unable to help himself.

Raoul pulled back, studying him. “You’re really that sore?”

His unveiled disappointment bothered Yui, who shook his head. “Don’t mind me. I want you...to do whatever pleases you, Master.”

For a long moment Raoul simply stared down at him, struggling with the strong emotions that pulled at him. Yui’s perfect obedience was a source of great pleasure to the Blondie, who found that something deep within him yearned to be catered to, to have his every command obeyed without question, his every need anticipated and met immediately. Now that he had begun taking Yui, he realized that the boy had been serving him admirably for years. He also knew that he had, on numerous occasions, threatened him with various punishments that bordered on the absurd; and yet, never once had Yui rebelled against him. His wishes had always been promptly met, without complaint. For some time he had been meaning to say something about the way he had treated Yui in the past, but he had never found a way to begin.

He decided that this was the moment. “Yui,” he began, then faltered, falling silent for a moment.

Yui looked up at him with large, brilliant green eyes, waiting. Raoul traced a finger along his cheek, marveling at the softness of his skin.

“There were times,” he started again, “when I...threatened you. In the past, I mean. Perhaps I frightened you.”

Yui, taking his Master’s sudden silence as a hint that he should respond, thought about this for a moment. “At times,” he admitted, then smiled. “But...I did not truly believe you would do most of those things.”

“No. I certainly would not have. I was only...before you, that is...before I began to take you, I did not see you in the same way I do now. You. Or any Furniture.”

Yui nodded. “Of course, Master. You are a Blondie. I am just a Furniture.”

Raoul let his fingers move to Yui’s mouth, tracing a path long his upper lip. “Not just a Furniture.” He said this so softly, Yui could barely hear him. Unsure of how to respond to this, the youth simply looked up at the magnificent Blondie, marveling at the beauty of his body glistening in the water spray.

Taking hold of his hand, Raoul guided him to the shaft of his already engorged cock, showing him with firm strokes how he wanted to be pleased. Yui immediately obliged him, sending shivers of excitement through the Blondie, who now desperately wanted to take the boy but was reluctant to cause him any more pain.

Yui smiled at Raoul’s sex sounds, his tiny gasps and moans, the lust in the Blondie’s eyes a powerful source of persuasion. He found that he truly wanted to give Raoul all that he could, despite his soreness. With deliberate suggestiveness, he lifted a leg and hooked it over his Master’s arm.

Needing no further prompting, Raoul immediately lifted his other leg, pinning him up against the wall as he repositioned himself to press up to his portal. “Yui,” he breathed. “I want you so terribly.”

“I am ready for you.”

Closing his eyes, Raoul then penetrated, his groans mingling with Yui's whimpers. "I'm...hurting you," he said, yet found he was unable to stop himself from continuing to enter, until he was fully inside. He immediately pulled back and plunged in again, moaning.

Yui struggled to reign in his whimpers and cries, biting his lip and closing his eyes. He was, in truth, dreadfully sore, and yet it thrilled him to hear his Master's pleasure. "No."

Now Raoul opened his eyes. "Don't lie to me," he whispered, smiling as he pulled out and penetrated again, this time a little harder.

The boy cried out openly, his nails unconsciously digging into the Blondie's arms. "Yes," Yui admitted. "It does hurt...a bit."

"You're a good boy." Raoul bent down to explore his mouth with a tantalizing kiss, and Yui went limp in his arms. This had the effect of relaxing him enough to make the penetration less painful.

Sensing Yui's sudden reception, Raoul immediately took advantage, thrusting into him with hard, almost violent strokes, his art accompanied by escalating series of his own groans, gasps, and growls, until he was grunting like an animal.

"Oh yes," he said, excited beyond bearing. "You feel so good, Yui."

The boy now found that he was starting to enjoy the sex...at least, a bit. He desperately wondered what it would be like to be doing what his Master was doing, and his heart pounded as he realized that soon...very soon...he would find out.

"Master," he said softly.

Raoul answered this with a grunt, opening his eyes to regard him with a lust-filled gaze.

"When I'm reconstructed...will you...let me...take you?"

Raoul's eyes glimmered mysteriously at this. He suddenly repositioned Yui further up the wall, thrusting into him so hard that the boy cried out again.

"Oh...so you want to take your Master...naughty boy," Raoul whispered, as he approached his critical point.

Yui, suddenly realizing that perhaps he had overstepped his boundaries by asking for such a thing, replied, a little meekly, "I'm sorry, Master."

"Don't...be sorry." Now Raoul closed his eyes, throwing his head back as he finally came, ejaculated hard into Yui's willing embrace. "Sweet mother," he breathed, shuddering.

For a long moment they remained thus, Raoul standing and holding Yui up against the shower wall, the water spraying down on them both. Finally Raoul withdrew, releasing the boy's legs and setting him back on his feet.

"I'm...sorry," Yui repeated again, worried that his Master had called him a "naughty boy."

"What did I just tell you?" Raoul scolded, with a smile. "I like that you asked me that. I love your obedience, Yui, but," now he leaned closer, looking him straight in the eyes, "a little naughtiness can be interesting, too."

Yui, unsure how to digest this information, remained quiet, wondering what his Master meant.

"Yes," Raoul continued, "one of these days I'd like to see you be deliberately naughty. Then I'd have to punish you." He smiled, his eyes shining.

Now Yui giggled.

"Oh, you find that funny, do you? Suppose I tied you up and gave you a good strapping? You wouldn't be laughing then, would you?"

"No, Master," Yui replied, happily, now trying to think how he could be 'deliberately naughty' in a way that would please Raoul, failing to comprehend that punishment, however playful, at the hands of the Blondie was something he ought to most conscientiously avoid.

They finished their shower then, both of them realizing suddenly how hungry they were. "I'll make a big breakfast," Yui said.

"Good. I'm famished."

As Raoul stepped out of the shower, he was surprised by the kitten who, having perceived the Blondie's tossing him off the bed

as a challenge requiring a response, now opted for a counterattack, leaping onto his leg and sinking his claws into the Blondie's damp skin.

The Blondie cried out, shaking his leg in a futile attempt to detach the kitten.

Yui, struggling to hold back an onslaught of furious giggling, immediately moved to assist his Master, managing to persuade the kitten to release his rather formidable hold.

"That blasted pixie!" Raoul growled, holding out his leg to examine it. "He broke the skin!"

"Yes. He is very naughty." It took all Yui's abilities not to laugh at his Master, who once again seemed to have been bested by a small ball of fur, and who looked rather comical standing there, naked, dripping wet, with his leg held out in front of him to examine the damage. He held the kitten up to his face to cover his smile. The kitten immediately began to purr. "And...Master! He IS a pixie!"

That's it...we'll call him...Pixie!"

Raoul shrugged at this, starting to regret bringing the troublesome creature into his home.

"When he's a little older, we can have his claws removed," Yui added.

"Yes. Let's do that." Raoul was much more enthusiastic about this prospect than about what his nemesis was actually named.

"He's only playing with you."

Now Raoul stood, hands on hips, looking down at Yui in disbelief. "Are you chiding me, Yui?"

Yui shook his head furiously. "N-no...Master." Then, suddenly remembering Raoul's earlier remarks, changed his strategy. "I mean...yes, Master. I am chiding you." He put Pixie down, and the kitten darted away on some other adventure.

Raoul laughed at this, pulling Yui close. "I see. So you're being deliberately naughty now. Then...I suppose you've given me a good excuse...to punish you. But then...I don't know if I should act on it, since I know you're only being naughty to be obedient."

Perplexed, the boy looked up at him, rubbing his nose which still tickled from the fur of the kitten. “Well,” he began, then stopped, bewildered as to what he should say next.

The Blondie found this slight movement endearing, and held the boy even closer. “Tomorrow Yui,” he said, softly. “Are you ready?”

Yui nodded, closing his eyes as he leaned against the Blondie’s warm chest. He was more than ready. Tomorrow...for the first time in his life...he would truly be...a man.

Iason's Decision

Xian continually turned to stare at Juthian throughout the entire trip to his villa, a weekend home located on the outskirts of Eos next to Lake Erphanes. His excitement was such that he found he could not even speak, other than to whisper the boy's name every now and then. He'd decided to take Juthian to his rarely used home for this occasion, feeling uneasy about bringing him to his bed with Toma, his Furniture, lurking in the house. Although Toma had served him faithfully, Xian knew he was also a shameless gossip, and the last thing he needed was all of Eos talking about his relationship with Juthian. Although the villa was typically only used in the summer, it was cleaned and stocked every week for the rare occasion when it might be used.

An occasion such as this.

Juthian was flattered at his Master's attention, similarly at a loss for words. At one point Xian reached over and placed his hand on his thigh, stroking him with his thumb. With uncertain, trembling fingers, Juthian placed his hand over his Master's.

Now Juthian noticed for the first time that they were near the lake region. "Are we going to the villa?" he asked, confused.

"Yes," Xian smiled.

"Oh." The small word failed to convey Ju's true feelings on the subject, for he adored the villa, and was thrilled to be going there alone with his Master. It was a scenario he had fantasized about many times. His only sorrow was that he was no longer physically equipped to enjoy the experience as he would have liked. But he couldn't wait to bring Xian pleasure.

And Xian could hardly wait to be pleased. Anxious to commence with their special agenda, Xian began to drive a bit faster--too fast, in fact. His speedometer flashed as he passed 300 Cepaks, triggering a reprimand.

“Xian Sami. You have exceeded speed protocols. A fine of 5000 credits has been deducted from your portfolio. Please reduce your velocity to a speed within accepted parameters immediately or your vehicle will be placed on automatic.”

The Blondie swore, slowing down to just under the limit. Unable to help himself, Juthian giggled, having never heard his Master swear before.

“Oh, you find that amusing, do you?” Xian said with mock sternness.

Juthian nodded.

“Is that so? Shall I tell you what happens to naughty boys who laugh at their Masters?”

Juthian giggled again, enjoying his Master’s playfulness.

“You laugh, but I guarantee you won’t find it so amusing when I turn you over my knee for a good switching. I’ve heard Iason thrashes his pet, so I see no reason why I shouldn’t do the same.”

Juthian smiled, not wanting to correct his Master’s referring to him as his pet. But if he wasn’t a pet, what was he? He decided to brave a question. “Master?”

“Yes, Ju?” Xian smiled.

“Am I to be your Furniture now?”

For a moment Xian looked puzzled. Then, realizing why Juthian had asked, he fell silent, considering. “I haven’t worked out all the details, Ju. I only know that I want you with me. But of course you know that we’ll have to be very careful. That’s why we’re going to the villa tonight.”

Juthian nodded. He knew well Toma’s proclivity for gossip. In his opinion, it was going to be impossible to hide the matter from Toma for long.

“In fact, I’m tempted to let him go,” Xian continued. “Which is a shame. He’s been an excellent boy.”

“Master Iason needs a new Furniture,” Juthian suggested.

“Juthian. That’s a brilliant idea,” Xian exclaimed. “I’ll call him first thing tomorrow. But...you’re not to call Iason ‘Master’ anymore.”

“Yes, Master.” Juthian smiled at Xian’s possessiveness. He had only been addressing Iason with his formal title, a courtesy that was given any Blondie--Master or Sir, or sometimes even Lord--followed by their given name. Now his thoughts drifted to Toma, who he knew would be thrilled to serve Iason Mink. Toma practically worshipped Iason, and had berated Juthian countless times for not seeming more excited about his new appointment at the Mink estate.

Not only that, but all the unusual activity in Iason’s household would be devoured by Toma, who thrived on gossip. As Iason’s Furniture he would rival Ru and Sarius as a socialite, armed with Blondie intelligence from the Head of the Syndicate. Toma would be a big change from Daryl, who always remained disappointingly tightlipped about what went on in Iason’s household.

But Juthian knew that the mere act of being sent to replace him after Juthian had returned to Master Xian would be open to countless speculations and theories. Toma was no idiot; soon enough he would piece together a theory that was close to the truth. Then it was just a matter of time before everyone in Eos knew.

“Don’t be afraid,” Xian said, reassuringly, mistaking Juthian’s worried look. “I promise to be gentle.” Now the vehicle slowed to a halt. “We’re here.”

Juthian found he was trembling, despite himself. Though he wanted nothing more than to be with his Master, his recent glimpse of Iason’s size had him worried, given Katze’s offhand remark that all Blondies were so endowed. And what if he was unable to please him? He knew how to perform for his Master, how to touch himself--at least when he still had something to touch--but what if he was disappointing when it came to pleasing his Master?

His thoughts drifted to that afternoon at the pavilion, and he derived some reassurance as he remembered how much his Master had enjoyed his touch, however awkward and unskilled.

They got out of the vehicle, a cold wind suddenly chilling them both.

"It's going to snow," Xian remarked, wanting to lift his Ju up and carry him into the villa but knowing that curious neighbors were peering from nearby windows.

Without being told, Juthian ran ahead to open the door for his Master, as he always did, his signature unlocking the old-fashioned wooden door with a welcoming chime. Inside, it was chilly, as the heat had not been turned on.

Juthian shivered. "I'll start a fire," he said, proud to show off his new skill to his Master. Katze had shown him how to light the fires in the Observatory and Library, and though he had never had the opportunity to do so, now he was glad for the instruction.

Xian nodded. "I'll start another one in the Master hearth. Come and join me when you're finished here."

Now that they were finally alone in the villa, Juthian found that he was terrified. He fussed over the fire, knowing he should get up and join his Master in the bedroom, but found that he could not.

He heard his Master approach and he froze, afraid to look up.

"You're quite finished, I think," Xian said, softly. "Are you avoiding me, Ju?"

"Yes, Master," he confessed.

Xian smiled. "I see. Then I shall make things easier for you." With that, the Blondie took two steps toward him and swept him up in his arms, carrying him easily to the bedroom, where he tossed him roughly to the bed. He stood, hands on his hips, looking at him sternly, though a smiled tugged at his lips. "Get undressed."

Obedying meekly, Juthian slowly undid the belt on his robe, letting the silken fabric slip from his shoulders. Xian watched him with glimmering eyes as he removed his gloves and shrugged off his own clothes--his boots, first, then his tailed outer garment and finally, his form-fitting bodysuit--until at last he stood, completely

naked, his taut muscles teased by the soft fall of his golden hair, a single braid running its length against the wild tangle of his tresses.

Juthian's eyes could not help but be drawn to the immense erection that greeted him from his Master's encouraging hand, and he shivered, alarmed. Though he had caught glimpses of the Blondie's organ over the years, he'd never had an unrestricted view like this, and now he was decidedly worried about their bedroom agenda.

Xian laughed softly. "I must say, you look rather unhappy to see me, Ju. Am I that frightening to you?"

Juthian nodded, unable to speak.

Xian laughed again, then approached him slowly, crawling onto the bed as he gently pushed him back onto the soft, down-filled covers. He lay on top of the boy, his erection pressed against his stomach as he slowly prodded open his mouth with a unhurried kiss, his hands gliding the length of his lithe body.

His Master's kiss relaxed Juthian, who found himself going limp beneath him. In contrast, Xian became increasingly excited, murmuring Juthian's name over and over as he alternated between kissing him and biting his throat, eliciting gasps of pleasure and pain from the boy.

"You excited me so much at the pavilion today," the Blondie whispered, rolling onto his back and forcing Juthian to straddle him. "Touch me, Ju."

"Where?"

"Everywhere."

With tentative fingers, Juthian began running his hands down his Master's smooth chest, his fingers enjoying the silken softness of his long hair, which spilled over his body and onto the bed. He stopped just short of his organ, which twitched in response to his approach. Xian smiled, enjoying the teasing. "Lower," he ordered.

Juthian obeyed, taking hold of the Blondie's organ with shaking fingers.

“Yes,” Xian moaned, instinctively reaching out to place his hand over Juthian’s, showing him how he liked to be stroked. “Like this.”

The warmth of his Master’s hand over his own was thrilling to Juthian, and he offered Xian a timid smile as he fondled him.

“Good boy,” Xian whispered, closing his eyes for a moment. Then his hands slid around to Juthian’s bottom, and he began squeezing and kneading him, his fingers sliding closer and closer to his portal.

Juthian gasped, instinctively leaning forward when the Blondie pushed against him. This movement stimulated the Blondie, who mistook it as an invitation for deeper exploration.

Xian reached over to the table by the bed, dipping his fingers in a shallow bowl there. Juthian shivered a little when he realized it was oil, and his Master’s look left no question as to what he had in mind.

His Master’s hands slipped behind him again, one hand holding him apart as he slid a finger slowly inside him. “Look at me, Ju,” he demanded, when Juthian shut his eyes, embarrassed. “That’s one finger.” He thrust a little bit, his eyes glimmering. Then he inserted a second. “That’s two.”

Now Xian became aware of the boy’s violent trembling and he watched him, fascinated, as he continued to explore him intimately.

“Now I want to be inside you,” he whispered.

Juthian shook his head, eyes flashing. “I’m not...ready.”

Aroused by his defiance, Xian suddenly picked up Juthian by his hips and tossed him back onto the bed, running his fingers teasingly up and down his body.

“Oh...but I am ready, Ju.”

Juthian gasped when Xian paused at the hollow where his genitals once had been, an inexplicable look pressing into the Blondie’s features. In fact, Xian was quite angry at himself for agreeing to have Ju modified; it was yet another instance where his passions had gotten the better of his judgment. Juthian should have been intact for this, their first time together. Now he could not hope

to offer the boy any real pleasure, or at least any sort of consummation.

But that did not change the fact that he was quite ready for consummation himself. Now he dipped his hand in the oil and began lubricating himself, much to Juthian's horror.

"Please," Ju whimpered, "I...can't."

"Did I not tell you what I would expect from you, Ju?" Xian asked, a little sternly. "Now is not the time to change your mind about this."

"But," the boy eyed the immense organ, his voice shaking, "you're so big. As big as...Master Iason!"

At this, Xian's eyes narrowed, anger edging into his features. "How would you know that? And...didn't I just tell you not to call him Master Iason?"

"Yes, Master," Juthian murmured.

"Answer me, Ju. How is it you can compare my size with Iason's?"

"I...saw him once. With Riki."

Visibly relaxing a bit at this, Xian now cocked his head to the side as he continued lubricating himself suggestively. "So, you are frightened of me, is that it?"

Juthian nodded furiously. "Yes."

Xian smiled slightly at this. "I will try to be easy on you. But there's no turning back now, Ju. I've quite made up my mind to have you." He leaned forward slightly, his eyes widening. "And that time is NOW."

Grabbing hold of Juthian's legs, he flipped him over onto his stomach, much to Juthian's surprise, but paused, shocked, when he apprehended the deep whip marks on his back.

"Oh Ju," he breathed, one hand tracing a faint path down the arch of his back. "What have I done to you?"

Juthian did not reply, feeling, in his heart, still a bit angry at his Master for the whipping.

Despite Juthian's scarring, Xian was now quite aroused at the site of him so vulnerably positioned. On his knees, he pulled the

boy's hips up to his groin, pressing the tip of his organ up to his portal as he held Juthian's legs apart.

Frightened, Juthian squirmed in his hands, trying to escape.

"Stop resisting me."

"No!"

"Ju!" Now a little annoyed, the Blondie repositioned him firmly, preparing to penetrate.

"Please! Just give me a few more minutes!"

Juthian wailed so pathetically that Xian paused. Cursing, he released the boy, who looked behind him in surprise.

"Very well. I'll wait until you're ready," the Blondie said, through gritted teeth.

Juthian smiled. "Thank you, Master."

Xian nodded curtly, now rather painfully aroused.

"Shall I...pleasure you with my mouth?" Juthian offered, turning over and slinking toward him like an Aristian wildcat.

Xian caught his breath as the boy, now looking decidedly sexy and ready to please, approached him on his knees. He instinctively reached out to grab hold of his head with one hand, urging him forward.

"Good boy," he encouraged, as Juthian took hold of his shaft. Though Ju had only paired with a few other pets, he had watched many others and had a good idea about how to pleasure his Master in this manner. He knew that the Blondie would instruct him, if necessary. Juthian was quite happy at the moment, thrilled, and not a little surprised, that his Master had caved to his pleas, and he intended to make up for his disappointment however he could.

With deliberate provocation, Juthian slid his tongue slowly around the tip of the Blondie's massive cock, gazing up at Xian with wide eyes. Xian sucked in his breath, shivering. As the boy continued, a low moan escaped from the Blondie, who, being both unaccustomed to direct stimulation and at the moment decidedly aroused, quickly realized that he would not last long.

Juthian paused, finally guessing the flavor of the oil that so liberally coated his Master's organ. "Gardanian Cherry!" he exclaimed.

"Don't stop," Xian urged, pushing himself up to the boy's lips. "Open for me."

When Juthian opened his mouth to take him, he began to pant.

"Oh, Ju," he gasped, now thrusting into the boy's mouth. Feeling unable to suppress his urge to release, he suddenly did so.

He groaned, shutting his eyes as his semen shot into the boy's throat, hands now grasping Juthian's head, preventing him from moving. Juthian felt the hot, salty semen slide down his tongue, and realized, with some surprise, that his Master had already ejaculated, far sooner than he had anticipated. After the Blondie released him, he looked up at Xian again, to find him staring down at him, a smile teasing his lips.

"That was sweet, Ju."

"I can do better...if you show me how."

Xian smiled. "It was quite perfect. Come here." The Blondie then pulled the boy to him as he lay back down on the bed. He kissed the top of Juthian's head.

"Thank you for...before. For waiting," Juthian whispered.

Xian touched the boy's nose with his finger. "I'm not finished with you yet. I intend to take you, before this night is through. Whether you're ready or not. It's only mid afternoon now."

"Yes, Master," Juthian murmured, snuggling close to the warm Blondie.

"You probably should have let me take you just now. Because now that I've spent myself once--no twice, today, I'll last much longer when I take you tonight."

Juthian had no reply to this, not caring to dwell on this revelation.

Xian put his arms around him, smiling. "Tonight you're going to be mine...completely."

Juthian closed his eyes, sighing. Because his Master had given him more time to prepare for consummation, he now felt he could

conquer his fear over what was coming. In his heart, he truly wanted to give himself completely to Xian, for he knew that, in doing so, the Blondie would somehow also belong to him.

* * *

Although he hid in his room for a good hour, eventually Tai felt compelled to return to the kitchen and begin dinner preparations. He poked his head out into the hall, checking to see if Odi was around, feeling unready to confront the virile bodyguard so soon after their unexpected hallway encounter. Encouraged by the deserted corridor, he made a dash for the kitchen back door, only to be intercepted by Katze, who turned the corner at precisely that instant.

Blushing furiously, Tai averted his eyes, nodding toward Katze in a way that left no mistaking his chagrin over their last meeting, and was somewhat mortified when it became apparent the auburn-haired youth intended to speak to him.

“Tai. Hold up a minute. I wanted to ask you something.”

Tai paused, daring a sidelong glance at Katze, who offered him a reassuring smile.

“I was wondering if you,” now Katze’s voice lowered to a whisper, “knew anything about aphrodisiacs. I mean...for Furniture. I heard this rumor of a concoction that is made on Aristia.”

Tai relaxed a little. This was a subject he knew plenty about. “Oh, you mean Tarnacsian cider,” he replied, nodding. “Yes. It’s made from a special spice, Tarnacsia. You can only get it from Aristia.”

At this, Katze looked disappointed. “Oh. I was hoping I could get my hands on some tonight. Daryl’s a little pissed off at me and...well, I won’t get into the details. It’s just....I was hoping to make things up to him.”

Tai grinned. “You’re in luck. I brought lots of spices with me. Including Tarnacsia.”

Katze brightened. "Then...could you give me some? I'll pay you...whatever you want."

"No need for that. But I can't just give it to you. I'll have to make the cider before it's of any use to you--though that's not a problem. It needs to stew for a good hour before it's ready though."

Grinning, Katze nodded. "Perfect. By then Daryl will be waking up again. So you...don't mind making this for me? And...does it truly work?"

"I don't mind in the least. It's not difficult to make. And...when it's made right--full-strength, that is-- supposedly it is a moderate aphrodisiac for a eunuch, though full-strength is too much for an unmodified male, so don't...be offering it to anyone else."

"I won't," Katze promised. "Thanks, Tai. I...owe you."

"You can repay me," Tai replied, lowering his voice to a whisper, "but not spreading around what happened earlier today. In the kitchen, I mean. I'm...really rather mortified."

"Deal. I won't even tell Daryl."

Relieved, Tai nodded. "Thanks."

"Although...you have nothing to be embarrassed about. I'm a bit envious of you, actually."

Blushing, Tai smiled shyly before backing away through the kitchen door. "Then...I'll get started on that cider."

Katze answered that with a little salute and a grin before turning away, thrilled to have something to cheer up Daryl, who he knew would pout all day about not being able to use the G-wave devices. Perhaps it was a little sadistic to offer him an aphrodisiac when no consummation was possible, but Katze knew Daryl would nevertheless enjoy anything that gave him sensations he would not normally experience.

As he turned the corner toward the great hall, he almost collided into Odi.

"Holy shit," he gasped.

"My bad," Odi apologized. "I thought I heard Tai's voice."

"I was just talking to him. He's in the kitchen."

Odi, who had been impatiently waiting for Tai to emerge from his room, smiled at this information. "Katze. I've been meaning to ask you. I need to get a Class-9 Residual Tracer of some sort. I can't seem to locate one."

"Who makes it?"

"As far as I know, they're only manufactured on Alpha Zen."

Katze nodded. "That might be a problem. Everything's a little unpredictable now. We're hardly getting any shipments in from Alpha Zen. But...the trade convention's next week, and hopefully all the problems will be sorted out there. There should be quite a selection of merchandise at the convention, too."

"Next week?" Odi frowned. "I was hoping to get something sooner."

Katze shook his head. "I'll make some calls. But my guess is you'll have to wait."

Disappointed, Odi fell silent. He wanted to check for residuals right away, and the inability to procure the right equipment had been frustrating. Daryl's idea to check for a residual signature had been brilliant, and now Odi was annoyed that he couldn't immediately act on it.

He nodded, putting a hand briefly on Katze's shoulder. "Thanks," he muttered, as he wandered off, deep in thought. Suddenly, he remembered that Askel and Freyn had some connections on the border planets. It was unlikely, but possibly they had more access to Alpha Zen imports, or at least to the devices he wanted.

He immediately went to the penthouse entrance, where he found the brothers engaged in a typical argument.

"No, because yours is curved."

"So? That just provides better stimulation."

"You're delusional," Freyn said, laughing.

"Odi! You decide. Which of us has the most pleasure-giving penis?"

Odi sighed. "I'm not getting involved in another one of your ridiculous disputes."

“Oh come on! You can be objective,” Askel protested.

“To decide that question, I’d have to engage in sexual acts with both of you, and I’d sooner pair with my own sister.”

Askel pouted at this, offended, but Freyn laughed.

“Can I hump her after you?” Freyn asked, grinning.

Odi made a fist and threatened him with it, and Freyn cowered back in mock terror.

“I was just kidding!”

“Why doesn’t he want to have sex with us?” Askel demanded, sulking.

“Bloody hell. Quit pouting already. I wouldn’t want to have sex with you either.”

Now Askel smiled. “Too late, lover.”

At this, Freyn blushed furiously.

Odi shook his head. “I don’t want to know. Look. I came out here to ask you if you could contact your connections in the border planets. See if you can locate a Class-9 Residual Tracer.”

“Those are only made on Alpha Zen,” Freyn replied.

Odi sighed. “I know. But I was hoping someone on the border planets might have one.”

“I’ll call around, but you’ll probably have to wait until the convention.”

With a curt nod, Odi turned and left the brothers, who immediately began arguing again.

“You didn’t have to tell him.

“I can’t believe you actually forgot about it.”

“Oh come on! We were, what...thirteen?”

“Admit it. You liked it,” Askel said, smiling.

“In your dreams,” Freyn snorted.

“Oh Askel! Just like that!”

“Hush, you moron!”

“I’m gonna come! I’m gonna come! Oh!”

“Shut the fuck up or I’ll pound your face in!”

Askel laughed, punching his brother in the arm. “Admit it,” he whispered, leaning over to kiss Freyn on the neck.

“Shit! Cut it out!” Freyn growled.

“Look at this!” Askel slid a hand up his brother’s thigh to his bulging erection. “I still turn you on.”

“You’re...sick.” Freyn grabbed hold of his hand, pushing him away.

“Oh, I’m sick? You’re the one with the bloody hard on!”

“Hush,” Freyn snapped.

“Just wait ‘til tonight. I’m gonna slide down under the covers and give you a lovely little blow job.”

“Fuck.” Freyn stood up, suddenly uncomfortably aroused. “I’m going to the can.”

Askel laughed hysterically at this. “Oh fuck! I’m gonna die!”

Freyn scowled at his brother as he made his way into the penthouse, desperately hoping his erection would escape notice from the occupants within.

No such luck.

Riki was ambling into the great hall just as Freyn was heading toward the bath hall, and his eyes immediately gravitated to Freyn’s immense bulge.

Riki smiled. “Oh Freyn. You look really...happy to see me.”

“Fuck off,” Freyn snapped.

Riki laughed, drawing Iason’s notice.

“Riki,” he scolded. “Come here.”

“What? I wasn’t doing anything.” The mongrel strolled over to Iason’s chair, leaning on the armrest.

“It is not polite to draw attention to potentially embarrassing matters.”

“Oh really? Then I can’t say that you’re giving me a hard on, wearing those cute little spectacles?”

A slight smile played at Iason’s lips. “Riki,” he sighed.

“I’m totally serious! Wanna see?” Riki started unzipping his pants, but was stopped by Iason, who grabbed hold of his arm.

“Not now, love. I need to finish what I’m doing.”

Riki tilted his head, trying to see what Iason was reading. “You’re not reading that fucking General Code still, are you? And

you'd rather read that than have some of this?" Riki punctuated his comments by thrusting his pelvis forward, hands on his hips. He continued thrusting in an almost comical way, humming a bizarre little tune.

Iason could not help but laugh. "Don't worry, pet. I have plans for you today."

"Oh, you have PLANS, do you?" Riki grinned. "Well, I hope your plans don't include fucking me. Cuz I'm too sore."

"If my plans include fucking you, Riki, then you will be most decidedly fucked."

"Hey, until then, can I go swimming?"

"If you wear swimming trunks."

"I don't have swimming trunks!"

"You have bottoms you can wear. Like that little black outfit you despised wearing the first year you came here."

Riki wrinkled his nose. "I still hate wearing that! It doesn't cover anything!"

"I don't understand you, pet. You complain about coverage, and yet you want to go swimming naked."

Riki, feeling trumped by this observation, fell silent for a moment. "Well, I suppose those would make good swimming trunks," he conceded.

Iason nodded. "And be sure you dry off before you go prancing down the hall. The last thing I need is someone slipping and breaking their neck because you left a trail of water down the corridor."

"I don't go prancing anywhere," Riki muttered, ignoring Iason's mandate.

At that moment, an alert sounded from the communications center. Iason rose to answer it, nodding to Riki. "Use the indoor pool. It's getting a bit chilly now."

"Then why do you keep the outdoor pool full and heated?" Riki wondered aloud, as he strolled off.

Iason went to the computer terminal, catching his breath when he saw who the transmission was from.

Commander Voshka Khosi.

Slipping his spectacles off, the Blondie took a moment to compose himself before answering.

The face that filled the screen was nothing short of breathtaking: dark eyes, dark hair, smoldering sensuality. Iason immediately saw the resemblance to Anori, but there was no question Voshka had a distinctive look, all his own.

"Iason Mink, I presume?" Voshka's voice was low and smooth, languidly confident.

"Commander Khosi?"

"Call me Vosh," Khosi replied, with a teasing smile.

Unsure how to respond to this, Iason simply returned the smile. "An honor. How may I help you, Commander?"

"I see. Already you are toying with me, refusing my requests. Didn't I just tell you to call me Vosh?"

Iason laughed softly. "My apologies. You have me...at a disadvantage. I know you only by reputation, and yet you address me as though you...already know me."

"Ah. I do know you. I have been asking everyone about the great Iason Mink, head of the Syndicate. And yet, despite all the glowing descriptions of you, I find I am quite unprepared for your physical beauty. You are truly stunning, Iason."

Iason caught his breath, feeling at a loss for words. Voshka stared back at him, eyes glimmering.

"And I see it's true what they say. Blondies are shy when it comes to direct advances. Is it true you prefer to merely watch your pets pleasure one another?"

Again Iason felt unsure how to respond, and was relieved when the Commander continued.

"Though I have good reason to believe it IS possible to seduce a Blondie," Voshka continued. "Perhaps you remember my brother, Anori? He was staying with you when he died."

"Yes," Iason managed to reply, quickly donning some semblance of composure. "Of course I remember Anori. A tragic loss."

“Yes. A tragic loss indeed. But...my apologies. I’m digressing. Let me get to the purpose of my call. I have decided to attend the trade convention on Amoi next week. I think this is the best course of action to get the trade routes back up as quickly as possible.”

Iason nodded. “An excellent idea.”

“I’m glad you approve. We will have quite a bit to discuss, you and I. I was wondering if you could advise me as to where I should stay?”

Iason paused for a moment. The polite thing to do would be to invite the Commander to stay at the penthouse. In fact, there was no way to avoid the invitation without offending Khosi. “The best hotel in Tanagura is the Denovian Royal. All the dignitaries stay there. But you are more than welcome to stay at my penthouse. It is not nearly so elegant as the Denovian, however.”

Now Voshka leaned a little closer to the screen. “I was hoping you’d invite me, Iason. I’m very much looking forward to the chance to get to know you more intimately. I accept your invitation.”

Struggling to hide his disappointment, Iason smiled. “Excellent. And when might we expect you?”

“A week out from today. How much of my retinue might I bring?”

“I own 30 suites on this floor. Each can hold about four persons comfortably.”

“Excellent. I’ll bring 25 men.”

Iason bowed his head. “As you wish.”

“Oh my. You really are adorable,” Voshka whispered. “Tell me, Iason, would you be that accommodating in bed?”

When Iason did not reply, the Commander laughed. “Forgive me, I’ve embarrassed you. I’m afraid I’m something of a barbarian, at least when it comes to carnal pleasures. Though I promise not to take you against your will.”

Regaining his composure, Iason answered demurely, “then, I’m in your debt.” He looked up at Voshka, batting his eyes.

Voshka laughed again. “Oh, aren’t you the little flirt? My, my. Anori was right...you Blondies are irresistible.” Now his voice

lowered again and he gazed at Iason seductively. "You've given me a massive erection, just talking to you. Would you like to see it?"

"Thank you for the offer," Iason replied, quickly, "but I'm afraid I must decline."

Voshka smiled. "I see. Perhaps another time, then?"

Iason merely bowed his head again, averting his eyes.

"Oh...you're wickedly seductive," Voshka whispered. "I'd like to get my hands in that hair of yours, and then kiss that lovely neck--"

"We'll look forward to your arrival then," Iason interrupted.

"I must say, I'm rather unused to being put off. You...intrigue me." Voshka began openly stroking himself, and though his maneuvers were not visible on screen, it was perfectly clear to Iason what he was doing.

Iason froze at this, horrified, once again completely at a loss for a response.

"Yes. I'm going to come, just looking at your beautiful face."

"Please forgive me," Iason answered, softly. "But I have another call coming in. It was a pleasure meeting you and...I look forward to your arrival."

Voshka chuckled. "I've quite terrified you. How very rude of me. Very well. I'll spare you my perversions...this time. Thank you for the gracious invitation. I promise I shall try to behave. It will be difficult, I can tell you that. Never in my wildest dreams would I have imagined you would be so perfect."

Iason lowered his eyes and then braved a final look at the Commander. "Until we meet, then."

"Until then," Voshka replied, a roguish smile curling his lip.

Iason abruptly cut the transmission. He was shaking. He sat down, trying to calm down. Voshka Khosi was going to stay at the penthouse. And there was no question what the Commander had in mind. As if the trade convention itself weren't enough...now Iason would have to deal with Voshka's advances all week. And the awkwardness of having to cater to the brother...of Anori. He sighed, feeling the need for a drink.

A pleasant smell was emanating from the kitchen, and Iason gravitated there to see what it was. On the stove, a big pot of some sort of golden-amber liquid was stewing, emitting a heavenly, sweet aroma. Deciding to try some, Iason ladled a bit of the concoction into a cup and took a sip. He closed his eyes, sighing. It was absolutely delicious, and seemed to help calm his nerves.

He drank several cupfuls of the mixture before he was apprehended by Tai.

“Master!” Tai exclaimed, causing the Blondie to jump.

“You quite startled me,” Iason scolded, his nerves on edge again.

“I am sorry but...that...what you’re drinking, you shouldn’t drink it!”

“Why ever not?”

“Because...it’s...Tarnacsian cider! It’s a very strong aphrodisiac...designed for eunuchs.”

Iason smiled. “It’s quite delicious, Tai. But you’d better check the recipe. I don’t feel a thing.”

“Yes, Master,” Tai murmured, knowing full well that it would take awhile for the Tarnacsia to have an effect.

“I might want to get this recipe from you, for the trade convention.”

Tai was too worried about the effect the cider would have on Iason to even comment. He fervently hoped the concoction had not been simmering long enough to produce as strong an effect as he feared was possible.

“Oh, and...I want to see the menu for next week. A special guest will be staying with us. Commander Voshka Khosi.”

Tai stared at the Blondie in disbelief. “You’re joking.”

“I assure you, Tai. I have no sense of humor when it comes to these matters.”

“Commander Khosi is coming here? But...I don’t know what to make!”

“You have several days to think about it. Of course, spare no expense.”

“Well, I guess I could make an Aristian pheasant roast. I’ve heard those Alpha Zen types enjoy game. And maybe a boiled lamb’s head.”

“Excellent. But I want to see the menu, before you purchase anything.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Now Iason retired to the great hall after pouring himself a glass of wine and putting on some relaxing music to soothe his nerves.

At first, the Blondie did feel a bit relaxed. But, as time passed, Iason became increasingly aware that something was happening to his body that he seemed to have no control over.

He was becoming decidedly aroused.

Cursing Tai’s cider, the Blondie adjusted himself several times, then decided that he would have to find Riki to relieve his mounting need.

As he made his way down the hall, he felt his desire increase exponentially, until it was almost unbearable. When he saw the trail of water leading to Riki’s room, he smiled. A good reason to punish his pet.

He entered Riki’s room, surprising the mongrel, who regarded him with wide eyes.

“Hey...what’s up?”

“Did I not tell you to be sure and dry off, pet? There’s a trail of water down the hall.”

Riki shrugged. “How do you know it was MINE?”

“Because it leads to your door. And since you disobeyed me, I think I shall have to paddle you.”

“What!”

Now Iason took in the mongrel’s wet body, his skin-tight, tiny bottoms clinging to his damp skin, and he changed his mind. “Or perhaps...I’ll just take you, pet.”

Taking a few steps forward, the Blondie grabbed Riki, thrusting his tongue down his throat as he began running his hands wildly up and down his firm body.

“Holy fuck!” Riki gasped, when Iason broke away to begin kissing his throat. “What got into you?”

“Pet,” Iason whispered, urgently. “I need you. Now. Bend over that chair.”

“No fucking way! I’m too sore!”

“Riki! Are you resisting me again?”

“Yes, I’m resisting you! Let me suck you off or something!”

The Blondie stared down at him, eyes dark with anger and lust. “When I tell you to do something, pet, you’ll do it. Bend over that chair.” Flipping him over, Iason proceeded to help him with this task.

“Okay, okay,” Riki grumbled. “Let me just slip these off, first.”

Iason paused, pleased that his pet had given in so quickly. He pulled off his gloves, letting his hands slide down Riki’s body to cup his bare ass as soon as it was revealed.

“Oh, pet,” he moaned, his arousal now almost painful. He started to unfasten his trousers, extraordinarily anxious for relief.

But as soon as Riki had kicked off his trunks, he suddenly darted off, gifting Iason with a parting grin before he bolted out the door and down the hall.

“Riki!” Cursing, Iason sprinted after him, catching up with his pet just as they reached the great hall. He grabbed Riki and picked him up, furious, carting him over to the dining table.

“Okay! Sheesh, can’t you take a joke? Ow! You’re holding me too tight!”

“Hush, pet.”

With one sweep of his arm, Iason cleared the table, sending priceless Aristian crystal crashing to the floor of the great hall. Tai came running, as did Katze and Odi, all of whom watched in amazement as Iason proceeded to position Riki on his back, pinning his wrists to the table, as he held his legs open with his arms.

Surprised, and a little alarmed, Riki looked up at Iason, puzzled. “What...the fuck is...”

Jason silenced him with a kiss, releasing one of Riki's wrists to unfasten his trousers and position himself for entry.

Riki used the opportunity to push against him with his free hand. "Dammit, Iason! I told you! I'm too sore!"

"Sorry, love," Iason whispered. "I need to be inside you." With that, he proceeded to penetrate, grabbing Riki's wrist and pinning him down again.

Riki howled his misery. "Bloody hell! Someone fucking kill me!"

"Oh pet," Iason breathed, thrilled with the sensations flooding through his body. "You feel perfect."

"Well, you feel like a big horse cock!"

At this, Katze struggled to suppress a laugh, motioning to the others to leave the hall so Master and Pet could enjoy some privacy.

Iason began thrusting harder, groaning with each thrust. "Oh yes. Yes, pet." Now he advanced to nothing short of a violent acquisition, fucking Riki so hard that the table shook. The soothing music playing in the hall seemed strangely incongruent with the rape taking place on the dining table. Iason continued to groan and grunt, making all sorts of vocalizations that were atypical for the usually rather reserved Blondie.

Pouting, Riki refused to enjoy their congress, turning his head aside when Iason tried to kiss him again.

"Stop resisting me, Riki," Iason snapped.

"Why shouldn't I resist! You don't care how I feel at all!"

Now Iason nuzzled his neck, softening a bit. "I'll attend to your needs later, pet. I promise," he whispered, then straightened up to reposition Riki, pulling him to the edge of the table and then pushing his legs back.

"Oh yeah? Will you do...anything I want?" Riki gasped, staring up at Iason through half-closed lids. He was now starting to enjoy the sex, though he was too proud to admit it, his breathing increasing until he was almost panting.

But Iason knew his pet well, could read the desire on the mongrel's face and hear the pleasure in his breathing. "Riki," he

groaned, shivering. He closed his eyes as he shifted his position for deeper penetration. Riki felt so tight, so perfect, and Iason was so aroused, he could hardly bear it. With a few final thrusts, he ejaculated, groaning and shuddering at the same time.

“That sort of sounded like a horse, too,” Riki commented.

His senses slowly returning to him, Iason looked down at the mongrel who stared up at him with an impish grin. “So are you going to do anything I want now?”

“That depends on what it is you want to do, pet,” Iason replied, withdrawing.

He released Riki, who winced a little as he sat up. “You really fucked me good, that time,” he muttered. “So how about you let me tie you up?”

The Blondie sighed, still enjoying the aftereffects of his orgasm. “Very well.”

“Fucking for real?” Riki cried, excited.

“But if you’re planning to torture me with some agenda of discipline, then no, pet.”

“Oh no, I just thought it would be kinky,” the mongrel lied. In fact, this was exactly what he had in mind, and he couldn’t wait to get the Blondie tied up and vulnerable and then discipline him thoroughly. Of course, Riki knew this meant he would have to endure punishment once Iason was released, but since he was always getting disciplined anyway, one more session didn’t much matter, by his accounting. “So...can we do that now?”

“Later, pet. After dinner.”

Riki peered at the broken glass that covered the floor. “Are you sure we’re still having dinner?”

Iason smiled. “Tai,” he called.

“Yes, Master,” Tai said, running into the hall.

“Clean up this mess. You can find more dishes in storage. Katze will show you where, if you don’t already know.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“And...it appears you were right about that cider,” Iason added, with a wry smile.

“Yes, Sir. I’m sorry, Sir.”

“What cider?” Riki demanded, moving to slide off the table.

Iason immediately stayed him. “No, Riki.” In a fluid movement, the Blondie picked up his pet, carrying him across the great hall to the corridor, where he set him down. “You’re barefoot.”

“What cider?”

“Go get dressed, Riki.”

“Don’t answer me then,” the mongrel muttered, heading back to his room. He felt a little mystified at Iason’s behavior, but at the same time he was thrilled that the Blondie was apparently stupid enough to let himself be tied up by his own, oft-punished pet. Riki knew this would be the only opportunity he would ever have to truly discipline Iason, and he was looking forward to really giving it to him. He shivered a little when he thought about what his own punishment would be for such an outrageous transgression, but he was convinced it would be worth it.

Iason retired with his book to the Library, hoping to finish reading the Code before dinner. He was almost completely sure that he would agree to be Aki’s Guardian now, but he felt compelled to read the entire section on Guardianship before he announced his intentions.

As Tai crouched down to pick up the pieces of broken glassware that covered the floor, he was joined by Katze and Odi, who both came to help him.

“So what the hell was that all about?” Katze whispered.

“Oh! Master Iason...drank the cider!”

“Shit,” Katze laughed. “So that’s what it was.”

“Cider?”

“Tai’s making some special cider. For me and Daryl. An aphrodisiac.”

“It’s too strong for most people. I mean, people who aren’t...who are intact.”

“How disappointing. I’d like to try a cup of it.”

Tai shook his head. “You’d better not.”

“You’ve got dinner to attend to,” Odi said, reaching out to take hold of his wrist. “Go ahead, we’ll take care of this.”

“Are you sure?”

“Most definitely,” Odi replied, smiling. Startled when Odi began stroking his wrist, Tai dropped the fragment he was holding. Odi used the opportunity to trace a finger down the palm of his hand. “I was hoping to talk to you,” he added, his voice a little lower.

“Oh! Perhaps...after dinner?”

“It’s a date. Come to my room.”

Katze raised an eyebrow at this, suddenly piecing together that something was going on between the Odi and the Aristian.

“To... your room?” Tai stuttered.

“Is that too fast for you? Very well. Why don’t we go out to the gardens, then.”

Tai nodded. “That...would be nice.”

Odi grinned. “You’re absolutely adorable when you blush.”

Tai pulled his hand away from Odi’s grasp, rising quickly. “I think something might be boiling over,” he announced, darting off.

Now Katze regarded Odi, who smiled back.

“You’re not out to corrupt that poor boy, I hope?”

“How presumptuous. I’ll have you know he’s the one who’s corrupted me.”

Katze snorted. “Doubtful.”

“You laugh, but this afternoon I found him in the corridor next to my room, jerking off.”

Katze smiled at this, compelled by his earlier promise not to comment. “And I suppose you helped him out?”

“Of course. I didn’t force myself on him, if that’s what you mean.”

“Hmmm.”

“You wait. He’ll be begging me for more, before the night’s through.”

Katze laughed. “Maybe if he drinks some of that cider first.”

“What’s going on?” Daryl stood at the edge of the great hall, peering down at Katze and Odi.

Katze leapt to his feet. "Daryl! Get your ass back in bed!"

"I'm not an invalid," Daryl protested.

"You need to rest."

"But what was all that commotion about? I heard a huge crash before."

"I'll tell you about it after you get back in bed."

"Do I have to eat dinner in bed, too?"

"We'll see. Maybe you can eat at the table, if I think you look well enough."

"I'm fine," he grumbled.

Katze answered that by picking him up and carrying him to the bedroom.

"Katze," Daryl complained, though he couldn't resist smiling, admiring Katze's bulging muscles. "You're really strong."

"You'd better remember that. These arms can love you, and these arms can punish you, if necessary."

"You wouldn't really punish me."

"I wouldn't test that, if I were you."

Katze carried Daryl into his room and set him down gently on the bed. "Now. You stay here. I have a surprise for you, later."

"A surprise?"

"Yes. But you won't get it, if you get out of bed again."

"All right."

"Good." Now Katze leaned down and kissed his forehead. "Now, mind me. Rest."

Daryl smiled, wondering what Katze had in mind, then shut his eyes, finding that he was, after all, rather tired.

Katze stared down at him, his heart nearly bursting with love for the boy.

* * *

Aki was playing in the lobby when his attention was completely absorbed with the arrival of two soldiers from Alpha Zen. He immediately recognized their elaborate, stylized armor, an

impenetrable xynthanium studded with jewels, with horns jutting out from the shoulders. They had, in fact, arrived early for the trade convention, and many more would be arriving each day, to ensure the safety of Commander Khosi.

These particular soldiers had stopped by the Taming Tower for a little recreation, making for Omaki's notorious brothel on the sixth floor. When Aki realized their destination, he was profoundly disappointed, hoping to get a better look at their amour, and at their laser-swords, which hung so brilliantly across their backs. He watched them disappear into the elevator, his eyes fixed on the numbers above the doors, hoping that they would not stop on the sixth floor, that the soldiers would decide to take rooms on some other floor.

But the elevator stopped at 6, and paused for some time before returning to the lobby.

Now Aki's little heart began to pound as he began contemplating disobeying his Master. By his best estimation, Master Omaki was still in his quarters, for he always answered correspondence in the afternoon, attending to matters of the Tower in the morning.

If he was very careful not to be observed, Aki reasoned, perhaps he could sneak up the stairway to the sixth floor and catch a glimpse of the soldiers. If he was lucky, they would be getting drinks at the bar in front of the brothel, going through the offerings before being placed in the queue for their selection.

Checking to be sure he wasn't being observed, the boy quietly made his way to the stairwell and quickly raced up six flights, his youth and excitement giving him extraordinary energy. As he reached the door to the sixth floor, he paused, remembering Omaki's warning about being paddled, should he disobey him again. Much as Aki was terrified at this prospect, the temptation to see the soldiers was simply too great to resist, particularly as the boy had convinced himself that his Master would not ever learn about his disobedience.

Pushing the door open a crack, Aki peered out, thrilled when he saw the soldiers at the bar, just as he had hoped. They were arguing, apparently both of them wanting the same selection, a boy-pet from Gardan, whose hologram now hovered before them.

Deciding that he had to get a closer look, Aki crept out, darting over to a large potted tree, one of many that lined the corridor, and knelt down there, peering over the top of the pot at the soldiers.

It was thus that Omaki came upon his naughty charge, as he had, by chance, stopped by the sixth floor to welcome the soldiers to the Taming Tower, having been alerted of their arrival by the front desk.

At first almost doubting his own eyes, Omaki crept up behind the boy, his anger mounting.

“Aki,” he said, finally.

Startled, Aki turned around and regarded him with horror, realizing that he had just been caught in the act of his disobedience.

Omaki reached down and yanked him to his feet, escorting him without a single word to the elevator.

Aki was too petrified to speak, and too frightened to even look up at his Master, who was still grasping his arm above the elbow, rather painfully. He could feel Omaki’s anger, though the Blondie said nothing, and Aki desperately tried to think of some excuse that might save him.

“I only wanted...I just wanted to see the soldiers,” he tried, meekly.

“Aki, I made it perfectly clear to you that you were NOT allowed on the sixth floor.”

The door opened on Omaki’s floor, and he dragged Aki inside the house.

Aki, who had been hoping against hope that Omaki had forgotten his promise to paddle him, now began to whimper as the Blondie went directly to the closet where he kept the paddle. He retrieved it, holding it up to the boy.

“And this is what I told you was waiting for you, should you choose to disobey me again, Aki.”

“Please! I won’t do it again! I won’t!”

“It’s too late for that now, Aki. You’re getting paddled.”

“No, Master! Please!” Aki pulled against him, resisting the Blondie’s trajectory toward his great chair.

“Yes, Aki.” Omaki reached down, scooping the boy up under his arm, and carried him over to the chair.

Aki kicked and screamed the whole way. Enyu, Kahlan and Ru watched this interchange from the kitchen where they had been talking over afternoon tea. Now they pitied the little boy, each of them realizing Aki was in for some serious pain.

“No! No! No!” Aki shouted, angry.

Furious, Omaki set the boy down in front of him, looking him full in the face as he held him firmly. “I warned you that you’d be paddled, Aki, if you even stepped foot on the sixth floor, didn’t I? You disobeyed me. Now you’re going to be punished.”

“Please don’t paddle me,” Aki begged, eyeing the implement in question where it lay on the armrest of the chair.

“I promised you a good paddling, didn’t I?” Now Omaki turned the boy over his knee, and for a moment considered paddling him with his pants up, knowing that it would be sufficiently painful.

“No!” Aki screamed.

Deciding that his unruly charge was in need of some firm correction, the Blondie opted for bare-bottom administration, tugging down Aki’s pants mid-thigh, and resting the paddle on his bottom as he pinned his arms firmly behind his back and positioned him just where he wanted him.

“Now, Aki, you’re going to learn what it means to be really punished. I guarantee you’re not going to like this.”

“Please, Master! Please don’t!” Aki wailed, squirming on Omaki’s knees.

The Blondie then proceeded to raise his arm and deliver a sharp first strike with the paddle, eliciting a shriek of horror and pain from Aki, whose body stiffened in response to the almost overwhelming pain. Omaki then commenced with a brutal paddling, the strikes coming hard and fast, with little or no rest between them,

as the boy screamed his misery. His little bottom, quickly darkening to a deep red, eventually began to welt, and Aki, who never in his wildest dreams imagined there was such pain, was hysterical, kicking and squirming in a futile attempt to escape the barbaric paddling.

“When are you going to learn to obey me, Aki? Naughty boy!”

“Master!” Aki screamed.

“If I ever catch you on the sixth floor again, Aki, this is what you can expect, only next time I’ll paddle you even harder. And longer!”

Aki, no longer capable of comprehensible speech, wailed his misery and despair, his cries rising above the formidable whack of the paddle against his punished flesh.

The paddling having made the desired impression on the miserable youth, Omaki finally brought the punishment to an end, as Aki continued to sob pathetically over his knee. His anger now abated, the Blondie regarded the boy’s flesh with some pity, the welts now raised and ugly. He knew that Aki would be wickedly sore for a good day or two, and his heart went out to the boy. Still, there was no helping it. Aki had deliberately disobeyed him, yet again, and had to be punished. Perhaps this time he would think twice before disobeying him again.

“You can go to your room, now, Aki,” he said, softly, lifting him up to set him on his feet.

Sniffing and choking on his own tears, Aki awkwardly made his way to his room, hands holding his bare, punished flesh, his pants still down around his thighs.

Now Enyu was at his side, smiling. “Did you want me, Master?” he asked.

“No, Enyu,” Omaki said, a little sadly.

Surprised, the Xeronian bowed and then backed away.

Omaki rose to go to the bath halls to clean himself up. He had ejaculated midway through the punishment session, before he even realized what had happened. And then he had perhaps paddled him a bit too hard in his excitement and anger. He shook his head.

Perhaps Iason was right. Aki was better off somewhere else. Even the Nursery would be a better choice. It would only become more and more difficult to resist the boy. Yes, it was better for him to grow up somewhere else...until it was time.

Almost as if by some telepathy, an alert sounded at that moment. An incoming call...from Iason Mink.

Omaki hurried to the terminal screen, hoping that the Blondie had finally come to a decision regarding the guardianship.

“Iason,” Omaki nodded, sitting down at the terminal.

“Omaki. I thought you’d want to know I’ve made up my mind regarding your request.”

“And?”

“I will be Aki’s Guardian.”

Omaki smiled. “Iason. I’m so...relieved. Thank you...I’m indebted to you.”

“Perhaps you should hear my terms first.”

“Your...terms?”

“Yes. I’ve decided that if he’s to be my charge, I’ll enroll him in the Academy for Elites. That means I want him by the end of next week, in time to start the second term.”

“By next week,” Omaki repeated, dismayed.

“Yes. I won’t have him starting midway through the term. And, if you want my honest opinion, I think he would do well to be out of your care as soon as possible. I’m sure you understand my meaning.”

“Yes,” Omaki nodded, feeling almost awed at Iason’s uncanny perception. It was as though the Blondie could read his mind, or see into his heart.

“Now, one other thing. When he is of age, I want to give him the choice of continuing his education as an Elite rather than as a Pet.”

“But...of course he’d rather be an Elite,” Omaki exclaimed, alarmed. “That...that defeats the whole purpose!”

Iason smiled slightly. “Then send him back to Midas Nursery. You’ll be assured of having him as a pet, that way.”

Omaki fell silent. He knew that it would be much better for Aki to be with Iason than to be exposed to the threats of the ill-named Nursery, which was a rough place for any youth to grow up in. But what if Aki decided to remain an Elite? What if he did not want to be his pet? Or...what would it be like for him, to grow up as an Elite and then become a pet?

“But...his hair,” Omaki pointed out, finally, rather feebly.

“He’ll be modified. His hair will be silver.”

The Blondie sighed, closing his eyes. “Very well. I agree.”

Iason smiled. “Good. I think, to make the transition official, and easier for Aki, we should have a party for him. I’m going to invite a select number of Elites to come. They’ll bring gifts, of course.”

Omaki nodded. “He’ll like that.”

“If we have the event next week, he can also meet my houseguest. I believe Aki is a fan of Commander Khosi, is he not?”

Omaki smiled. “The Commander’s staying with you? Oh my. Yes, that will make quite an impression on him, I assure you.”

“Good. Then let’s say...on Jupiter’s Eve?”

“Fine. Do I...need to do anything?”

“I’ll take care of all the arrangements. See you then.”

Omaki nodded, but not before Iason cut off the transmission. The Blondie stared at the screen for a long time, feeling both relieved for Aki’s sake, and extraordinarily sad, for his own.

Riki's Chance

The dinner chime sounded in the penthouse, and immediately everyone in the Mink household gathered at the table in the great hall. Since Tai had started cooking, his meals were rarely missed, as he was something of a wizard in the kitchen.

“Call in Askel and Freyn,” Iason said, sitting down at the head of the table. “They’ll eat with us tonight.”

“Yes, Sir,” Odi replied with a slight bow, wondering what the occasion was.

The brothers, who had been engaged in contest to see which of them could hold their breath longer, ambled into the hall, looking surprised, and a bit light-headed.

“You wanted us, Sir Iason?” Freyn asked.

“Yes. Sit down. There’s no reason why we can’t all eat here together at the table. You may take your meals with the rest of us from now on, unless I have guests or tell you otherwise.”

The brothers exchanged a look at this, delighted with the prospect of actually being able to eat at a table. Tai had already set the places for them and so they sat down, turning to Iason, who looked as though he had something more to say.

“I have several announcements,” the Blondie began, then stopped, taking a sip of his wine.

Everyone waited patiently, though the aromas of the dinner--a wild hen basted in its own juices-- was disconcertingly tantalizing.

“First, you must all be prepared for a very important guest next week. Commander Voshka Khosi, who I’m sure you’ve all heard of, will be staying at the penthouse throughout the trade convention.”

This announcement brought gapes of astonishment and a few gasps; Odi looked decidedly worried, as did the brothers.

“Yes, I see your concern,” Iason said, nodding to Odi. “After dinner, we’ll need to talk about security arrangements. He’s bringing a retinue of 25 men who will be staying on the floor. This, of course, presents something of a...problem, on a number of levels.”

Odi shook his head. “This entire building will need additional security. As well as the convention center. I don’t mind telling you flat out that this is out of my league. A foreign dignitary of that stature,” now he paused, looking to Freyn, who looked equally concerned.

“The Commander is bound to be a target, especially now,” Freyn agreed.

“Not only that. With that many men, the Commander also poses a threat to you,” Askel pointed out. “Although, he wouldn’t have any reason to want to harm you.”

Iason made no reply to this, lowering his eyes for a moment. “I will need to consult with Jupiter,” he said, finally.

The bodyguards all nodded in agreement.

“Who’s this Commander Whatever-the-fuck?” Riki finally asked, eyeing the roast hen. “And can we talk about him later? I’m fucking starving.”

“Have you forgotten how you are to address me, Riki?” came the Blondie’s reply. “Three strikes. After dinner.”

“Bloody hell,” the mongrel muttered, slouching down in his seat.

“Make that six.”

“But I wasn’t talking to you that time!”

“Nine.”

Riki opened his mouth to speak again, and then caught himself, letting his head fall back against his chair with a groan.

“Commander Khosi is the military hero who toppled the senate on Alpha Zen,” Daryl whispered.

“Whatever. Like I fucking care,” Riki whispered back.

“Are you two quite finished, or shall we wait a bit longer? Iason demanded.

“Sorry, Master,” Daryl said, meekly.

Nodding almost imperceptibly, Iason continued. “Second. I have decided to become the Guardian of Aki, Omaki Ghan’s charge. To celebrate his arrival, I will be hosting a party for him next week. I expect all of you to be in attendance and to help with the arrangements.”

Everyone fell silent at this, exchanging curious looks. A Guardianship was so unusual that most of them had never even heard of it. The thought of a small boy coming to live with Iason, in addition to Riki, was almost frightening.

“Third, as some of you already know, Juthian has returned to Xian Sami’s household, per Xian’s request. I have not yet made arrangements for a new Furniture,” now Iason looked at Katze, who looked rather stunned at this announcement, “but I am asking you to stay here, Katze, until someone suitable is found.”

“Of course,” Katze replied, puzzling over this news. Juthian was returning to his former Master? And Xian had actually come to Iason, asking to have him back?

“Finally. Daryl, tomorrow you will be going to Tanagura Medical for a new kidney. Two kidneys, in fact.”

Daryl, looking a bit surprised at this, was speechless, turning to look at Katze.

“Thank you, Iason,” Katze answered for him, smiling.

Iason nodded. “In the future, and this goes for everyone here, any medical problems are to be dealt with immediately. There is no excuse for hiding,” now Iason looked directly at Daryl, “a potentially serious problem that could easily be taken care of. I’ll not have members of my household dying off from sheer stupidity. Tai, the food looks stupendous.” He raised his wine glass. “Health and happiness.”

“Health and happiness!” The others raised their glasses, smiling.

Katze and Tai both murmured private prayers, Tai bowing his head almost to his plate.

The table erupted in conversation and activity then, as always, though this particular dinner was especially festive given all the news that had just been delivered.

Katze leaned over to whisper in Daryl's ear. "You heard Master Iason. Sheer stupidity. I think you deserve a bit of punishment for that." Katze punctuated this with a slap to Daryl's rear, or as much as he could get at while the boy was sitting.

Daryl smiled at this, blushing.

"And I'm going to give it to you, too. Just as soon as you're all better."

"Who do you pray to, Tai?" Odi asked.

"I pray to the Armah, the One and the All," Tai said, touching his fingertips to his forehead ritualistically.

"God or goddess?"

"Neither...and both."

"Ah. An Aristian deity, I presume?"

Tai thought about this for a moment. "Not just Aristia. All that Is comes from Armah and there returns."

"Is this that one with the three breasts?" Askel asked.

"That's Astrajia, moron," Freyn retorted.

"Yeah," Riki said, his mouth full of food, "Katze has a statue of her. What a body. I'd like to fuck her, three breasts and all."

Katze reached over and punched Riki in the arm. "Watch your mouth, dumbass."

Riki laughed at this, putting up his arms to ward off future assaults.

"Pet, how many times must I tell you not to talk with food in your mouth," Iason reproached.

Riki sighed rather loudly.

"What's that? Did you have something you wanted to say, Riki?" the Blondie demanded.

"No, Master," he muttered, lowering his eyes.

“Good. Might I remind you that you’ve already accrued nine strikes.”

“Reminders are not necessary, Master,” the mongrel replied, saucily.

The barest hint of a smile played on the Blondie’s lips. “You’re walking a very fine line, Riki.”

“Yes, Master. Whatever you say, Master. Would you like me to lick your boot now, Master?”

The others struggled desperately not to laugh at this as Iason continued to stare at his pet.

“Yes, Riki. In fact, I’ll have you do just that. Come over here and lick my boot.”

“What! You can’t be fucking serious!” Riki cried.

“That’s twelve,” Iason said, with a little smile. “And...I’m waiting, pet.”

Now Riki looked to Katze, as though thinking he might offer some help. Katze refused to return his gaze, focusing on his dinner as though nothing was going on, though his lip trembled as he struggled to keep from laughing.

Slamming his napkin down on the table, Riki rose, and with transparent reluctance, slowly walked over to Iason’s chair and then fell dramatically to his knees, proffering the demanded tongue action on the Blondie’s shiny white boot.

“Do you want me to ejaculate on your other boot, Master?” Riki purred, sweetly.

Unable to contain himself, Katze burst out laughing, which set off everyone else, and the entire hall erupted in a fit of mirth. Iason’s lovely laugh, like bells, floated above them all. Riki stood up and wiped his mouth, grinning at the Blondie, who stared back at him with shining eyes.

“Sit back down, pet, and finish your dinner,” Iason said, rising. “Tai, I’ll take tea, in the Observatory.”

Tai rushed to take Iason’s plate, eyeing it with concern. The food was hardly touched. “The meal was not to your liking, Master?”

“The food is delicious. I simply have no appetite,” Iason replied. Now Riki took notice, but said nothing. It was unusual for Iason to skip a meal, unless he was stressed over something. He watched the Blondie as he walked away, puzzling over this and wondering why he was going up to the Observatory.

“Holy shit,” Katze laughed. “I wish I had a holograph of that. You licking Iason’s boot. Priceless.”

“Fuck off,” Riki grumbled.

“Might I remind you, Riki, that you have twelve strikes coming, and it’s not altogether clear who’s going to be giving them.” Katze tapped his taming stick suggestively with a smile.

Riki dismissed this with a roll of his eyes, though fell silent.

“Would you please quit bouncing your leg like that,” Askel said, grumpily.

“I can’t help it. I have nervous energy,” Freyn replied.

“Yeah but it makes the whole table shake. Look at my water. It shouldn’t be jiggling like that.”

“What the fuck difference does it make if your water jiggles?”

“It’s making ME nervous.”

With an exasperated sigh, Freyn turned to Odi. “What are we going to do about this Commander deal?”

Odi shook his head. “Like I said, this is out of my league. I think we’ll need to involve the Police.”

“Just get a bunch of those...robots they have at the Midas auctions,” Riki said, biting into a roll.

“Yes,” Odi nodded. “That’s a good idea.”

“I can’t eat unless my water is level,” Askel complained.

“For crying out loud! Here!” Freyn picked up Askel’s cup and drank the entire contents. “Your water is level now.”

“Now what am I going to drink?”

“If you two don’t bloody shut up,” Odi began.

“Is something wrong with Master Iason?” Tai asked, suddenly, having just returned from delivering his tea.

“What do you mean?” Katze demanded.

Riki sprung to his feet without waiting for an answer and dashed up the stairs to the Observatory.

Iason was sitting in a chair there, his head in his hands.

“Iason? Is it...one of your headaches?”

“Yes, pet.”

“Have you taken something for it?”

“Yes.”

Katze and the others were now at the door. Riki turned. “Let me take care of this,” he said, dismissing the others.

“Another headache?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s chilly up here. I’ll start a fire,” Katze offered.

“Thanks.”

Riki went over to the chair and, pushing Iason’s hair aside, began massaging his shoulders. The Blondie sighed, letting his hands fall into his lap.

“That’s it. Just relax.” Riki worked his shoulders slowly, gently, shaking his head at the knots of tension he found. Iason was definitely worried about something.

His eyes drifted over to the divan. “Doesn’t that thing over there transform into a bed?”

“Mmm.”

Katze stood up, a fire now blazing in the hearth. “Yes, the controls are on the arm.”

“Why don’t we do that then, so I can give you a full body massage. Don’t you think that might help?”

“Yes, love,” Iason conceded, grateful.

“Anything else I can do?” Katze asked.

“Yeah. There’s a bottle...next to my bed, of massage lotion. Can you bring it up here?”

The amber-eyed youth nodded. “Sure.”

Riki walked over to the divan and pushed a few buttons on the arm panel. The furniture hummed softly and then almost seemed to fold up into the air, retracting as a bed emerging from a hidden compartment in the wall. The mongrel tore off the protective plastic

covering the sheets and then helped Iason undress and lie on the bed.

Katze returned with the lotion, his eyes gravitating to the bed where the Blondie lay, face down, his perfectly sculpted bottom framed by the silken trails of his long blonde hair.

“See something you like?” Riki whispered.

Scowling, Katze handed him the lotion, but not before hitting him with it on the head.

“Careful. Or I’ll tell Daryl,” the mongrel teased.

“You wouldn’t,” Katze whispered back, urgently. “Don’t even joke about that.”

Riki placed a hand reassuringly on his shoulder, and then went over to the bed, undressing as he went.

Katze indulged in a final peek as he left, just as Riki turned to see if he was still watching. With a naughty smile, the mongrel blew him a kiss before straddling Iason. Katze flipped him off as he retreated down the stairs, grinning.

Iason sighed, the warmth of Riki’s naked body on his lower back comforting, knowing what was coming.

“That’s right. You just lie there and enjoy this,” Riki whispered, moving Iason’s hair off his back, and then squeezing a generous amount of warming lotion into his hands. With slow, gentle strokes, he began applying the lotion to the Blondie’s back, methodically working out his stiffened muscles. “You’re really tight tonight.”

The Blondie only responded to this with a moan.

“How’s this feel?”

“Heavenly, pet.”

The crackle of the fire, and the mongrel’s skilled hands, the warm lotion, and the release of the opiate together worked to help relax the Blondie, whose mind had been full of a thousand different worries: Yousi’s logs and what they implied, Commander Khosi’s visit, memories of Anori’s death, his decision to become Aki’s guardian, Raoul’s modification of Yui, Xian’s confession and request regarding Juthian, the upcoming trade convention,

Jupiter's ultimatum regarding Riki, and countless other details that competed for his attention.

But Riki's soothing touch worked like magic, and slowly the pain began to leave him, the workings of his mind slowing a bit, and then a bit more, until finally he was in a state of blissful peace, a place far from the cares of the world, adrift between awareness and dreams.

"Feeling better?"

Riki's voice seemed to be floating from afar, and whether he was able to reply, to say that he was in the most perfect place possible, Iason did not know, for he was too far removed from his own body to remember if he had moved his mouth, or if he had found the words to express his reply.

A low moan escaped the Blondie's lips. Riki smiled, continuing to massage every part of his body, and then, when Iason had fallen asleep, he crawled into the bed next to him, and simply lay there, wondering.

Wondering what was causing Iason's headaches. Was it the Agatha? Stress? This...trade convention that was coming, this...General? And Riki found that he rather disliked being kept from Iason's thoughts, how the Blondie always seemed to carry the weight of his problems alone, shutting out Riki and everyone else, and retreating to some tortured, inner world. Iason was full of secrets, like a locked, ancient book with undecipherable script, even when open, impossible to fathom.

The mongrel sighed, closing his eyes. And as he lay there, his heart and mind wrapped around Iason's mystery, an image began to form in his mind's eye, a rather indistinct face, and a single word.

Anori.

His heart pounding, Riki opened his eyes, just as Iason opened his.

"Pet. That was...perfect," Iason whispered. "My headache is quite gone."

"Iason. Who is...Anori?"

Surprised, the Blondie simply stared at him, speechless. "Where did you hear that name?" he asked, finally.

Riki pointed to his head. "Just now. It came to me. Almost like a message."

Iason shook his head, smiling slightly.

"What is it?"

"I'm starting to...think, pet, that perhaps there's something to these claims. About Agatha."

Excited, Riki rolled onto his side, propped up on his elbow. "Why do you say that?"

"Because how else would that name have come to you?"

"And...what is so significant about...that name?" Riki whispered.

"It is the name of an Ambassador that stayed here some fifteen years ago. He died, while visiting Amoi, and while staying in my home. It is his brother, Voshka Khosi, who is coming next week."

"The General?"

"Commander."

"Then...well, how did he die?" Riki asked, intrigued.

Iason looked away. "A crash. He was out in my hovercraft when a sudden windstorm sprung up."

Riki studied Iason for a long moment. It was the first time he had ever suspected Iason of lying to him, and he wondered what other story lay tangled up with Anori, and what it had to do with this Commander's visit, and why Iason was so worried.

"Are you going to tell me...what's bothering you?" he asked, finally.

Now Iason turned back to him, smiling. "I feel quite well now, thank you pet."

"Iason...I wish," he began, then stopped.

"What do you wish, Riki?" Iason encouraged.

"I wish...you would open up to me. Tell me what's weighing on your heart."

For a moment, Iason considered telling Riki everything. But he found that he couldn't. Some secrets were buried so deep, so

twisted around his own soul, that he felt he could not extricate them without laying bare his innermost, private self. And when it came to his thoughts about Jupiter, and Yousi's logs, he felt it was far too dangerous to share this information with a pet, even with Riki. At least, not yet.

Iason smiled. "Don't tell me you're concerned about me?"

Riki snorted. "Of course I'm fucking concerned! You...and these headaches. They're getting worse, aren't they? You told Daryl he was being stupid...I guess that doesn't apply to you though, huh? Don't you think you should see a doctor about it?"

"I intend to ask Heiku about it when we're at the hospital tomorrow. He might know a specialist of some kind. But...Riki, I've had various scans and tests done already. They say it's the poison. They can't find anything else wrong."

"Oh." This was news to Riki; Iason hadn't told him he'd already been seeking medical treatment. Now Riki rolled onto his back, staring up at the stars that were just beginning to pierce the sky. "What you need is a good slum doctor. They know all about Agatha from the gang wars."

Expecting Iason to immediately dismiss this, Riki was surprised when, instead, the Blondie nodded. "I'll talk to Katze about it and see what I can find out."

"But your headache's gone now, though, right?"

"Quite gone."

"Then...how about you grant me a pardon on that taming?" Riki asked, batting his eyes.

Iason laughed. "Very well, pet. I'm quite indebted to you, so I'll grant you that request."

"For real?"

"Yes, pet. I'm sure you'll find some other disobedience to earn you more punishment soon enough."

Riki smiled, unable to argue with this assertion. Especially as he still fully intended to tie Iason up and punish him.

He yawned. Something about the cozy fire, lying close to Iason, the stars overhead, and the sound of the hot tub all worked together

to make him feel suddenly exceedingly sleepy. But he couldn't fall asleep; he was going to punish Iason tonight. Iason had promised....

* * *

As Katze returned to the dinner table, the others looked up with anticipation.

"So? Is he all right?" Daryl asked.

"He'll be okay. Riki's...giving him a massage," Katze smiled.

Daryl nodded. "Good. Those seem to work for him."

"Does Master Iason get these headaches often?" Tai asked, worried.

"Ever since he was poisoned with Agatha," Daryl answered.

"He was poisoned with Agatha?" Askel and Freyn exchanged a look.

"Yes. Earlier this season."

"I told you that when we first came here," Odi chided.

"You didn't say it was Agatha," Askel protested.

Freyn nodded. "That's right. You just said he was poisoned."

Odi shrugged. "So?"

"So...Agatha's that drug they used during the gang wars. It's rare that anyone survives it," Freyn replied. "And those that do--"

"Are never quite the same," Askel finished, melodramatically, widening his eyes.

The others laughed at this.

"Seriously, though, I've heard all sorts of strange things about it," Freyn continued. "Like it does something to the mind and affects sleep."

Askel nodded, reaching for another roll. "Not only that, but there was a story about one survivor who had visions. You know. Precognitions and all that."

"Isn't that the same one who died in his sleep?" Freyn asked.

"No, he's still alive--last I heard. You're thinking of that slum rat, Eyvind Foul-Fart," Katze replied.

Now Daryl started giggling at this name. Katze leaned over. "I heard the name fit, too," he whispered, smiling. "You're so cute when you laugh."

"Then you've heard of him, the one with the visions?" Askel asked.

Katze nodded. "Maylord. Last I heard, he was living in Neal Darts. But from what I remember, his headaches got so bad, he stopped going out."

"But how'd he get out of Ceres?" Askel asked.

Katze smiled. "Money. For awhile there, he was on an unbelievable winning streak at all the games. It got so the club owners wouldn't let him in. Of course the theory is, he had some sort of special ability to see the outcome of certain games."

Freyn snorted. "That's horseshit. No one can see the future. It's impossible. If it hasn't happened yet, there's nothing to see."

"I'm only telling you what the story is. Not that I believe it."

"It's a nonentity," Freyn continued. "You can't extrapolate something from nothing. It's the same reason time travel isn't possible. Time--"

"Blood hell," Askel interrupted. "No one wants to hear your stupid time travel theories again."

"I'll have to agree with that," Odi grinned. "Let's get back to the security issue. I'm taking it, if Iason's out with a headache, we won't be discussing this tonight?"

Daryl shook his head. "Probably not. Not for a good couple hours, anyway."

"Well, I liked Riki's idea. It wouldn't hurt to arm the entire building with automated units, in addition to armed guards and the Police."

"Would anyone like dessert?" Tai asked.

Askel perked up at this. "Ooo, I know I do! What is it tonight, Tai?"

"Aristian Honey Mallow Cake."

"Sounds delicious," Freyn smiled, and everyone nodded in agreement.

“Tai, since you started cooking for us, I’ve had to swim an extra ten laps a day,” Odi said, smiling.

Katze nodded. “It really is brilliant.”

Pleased, Tai blushed and bowed, then rushed off to retrieve the dessert.

Now Katze leaned toward Odi. “We all know why you’ve really been swimming those extra laps.”

The others snickered at this.

“Yeah, Odi. Trying to look good for the Aristian.”

Odi smiled, shrugging.

“Apparently it’s working. They have a date tonight.”

“A date!” Askel cried, leaning forward eagerly.

“Isn’t he a little young for you?” Freyn asked, smiling.

Odi rolled his eyes. “We can’t be more than six or seven years apart.”

“Yeah but, Odi...he’s just a babe. He’s probably not even developed yet,” Askel pointed out.

“I don’t know about that,” Odi replied, trying to suppress a smile.

Katze grinned, but said nothing.

“He’s so cute when he’s nervous and starts talking in that weird, stilted way. What was it he said last night? ‘Too long for waiting’?”

“Enyu used to do that, too,” Katze remarked. “When he was rutting, his Amoian would sound a bit off.”

Askel reached for his glass to get a drink, and finding it empty, sighed, turning to Freyn. “Give me some of yours, Freyn. You drank all mine.”

Freyn put his hand over his glass. “I don’t want your amoebas.”

“Amoebas? I don’t have amoeba, dumbass! Amoeba are in the ocean!”

At this, Katze started laughing hysterically, as did Askel.

Freyn blushed. “Germs then.”

“Fuck!” Askel was having trouble breathing, he was laughing so hard. “You’re ready to explain to us why time travel isn’t possible--when you don’t even know what amoeba are!”

Now Freyn punched him in the arm. "Shut up, moron! Who's the one who couldn't figure out the automatic soap dispenser! When it's bloody automatic!"

"Yeah but...it didn't have a label or anything."

"What, you need soap labeled to know it's soap?"

"You couldn't actually see the soap," Askel protested. "All you could see was the dispenser. So I wasn't sure what it dispensed."

Freyn laughed. "Well what's generally dispensed from a sink in the bath hall? What else could you possibly think would come out?"

Askel answered that by ignoring him, reaching for his glass again. "Give me a drink, Freyn! I'm dying here!"

"No!"

"I swear by Jupiter, if you two don't shut the fuck up, I'm going to have to start hurting people," Odi threatened.

Tai now arrived with the dessert and tea, putting an end to the dispute by pouring Askel the first cup of tea.

"Better watch out, Tai," Askel whispered. "We heard Odi's out to get your virginity."

"Yeah, Tai. Whatever you do, don't let him get you anywhere alone."

At this, Tai blushed furiously, averting his eyes.

"Knock it off, both of you," Odi snapped. "I'm bloody serious this time."

The brothers now observed Tai and, seeing his embarrassment, momentarily quieted.

"Mmmm. Delicious," Katze closed his eyes, enjoying his first bite of the sweet, honey drenched cake. "Sit down, Tai, and join us."

"Yeah, Tai. And if you want, I'm sure Odi wouldn't mind if you sat on his lap," Askel piped, sending Freyn into stitches.

"I said bloody knock it off," Odi growled, pointing his fork at Askel.

"Yeah, I wouldn't sit there now, if I were you," Freyn added.

The others snickered at this. Odi glowered at Freyn, but was rather mortified his growing erection hadn't escaped general notice.

“Would anyone like milk in their tea?” Tai asked, looking both embarrassed and a little puzzled.

“That depends. Does it have any amoeba in it?” Askel quipped.

Freyn rolled his eyes as the table erupted in laughter again. “You just wait, brother.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

Daryl yawned, immediately drawing Katze’s notice. “Are you tired?” Without waiting for an answer, he rose. “Let’s get you into bed.”

“I’ve been in bed all day,” Daryl complained, though he was, in fact, surprisingly weary.

“Up,” Katze demanded, hands on his hips.

Reluctantly, but feeling a little flattered by his lover’s attention to his every move, Daryl rose. Katze immediately swept him up into his arms, eliciting a squeal of delight from the weak boy.

Katze turned to look at Tai. “Will that...you know what...keep for any length of time?”

Tai nodded. “It can last indefinitely if I freeze it.”

“Good. Then do so. I think it’ll have to wait.”

“What are you talking about? What’s he going to freeze?” Daryl demanded.

“Never you mind. Your little surprise...I’ve decided you’re going to have to wait.”

“Why?” Daryl was disappointed, having looked forward to Katze’s surprise all afternoon. He was also a bit confused. What sort of surprise was this, that could be frozen?

“Because I said so,” his lover replied, carrying him off to bed.

Odi smiled. “Make sure you label that clearly when you put it in the freezer unit.”

Tai returned the smile.

“What’s everyone talking about?” Freyn demanded.

“Tai’s cider. He made some of this special cider for Katze as a surprise for Daryl. An aphrodisiac for eunuchs. Only Sir Iason got into it and,” now Odi laughed, “all I can say is...poor Riki.”

Tai nodded. "Master Iason was so excited, he swept all the dishes off the dinner table and mounted Riki right there."

"That crash! Yeah, we heard that," Freyn exclaimed. "I meant to ask about that but I forgot."

"It was fine Aristian crystal porcelain," Tai said, shaking his head.

"You mean those ones with the crystal edges? I loved those," Askel remarked, sadly.

Freyn seemed inordinately amused by this. "I never knew you had such a soft spot in your heart...for dishes, Askel. And what, might I ask, is your opinion on these dishes? Does this appeal to you, or do you prefer something more floral?"

"Piss off."

Now Tai rose to clear the table.

"I'll help you," Odi said, rising.

"Thank you but...that's not necessary," Tai replied, looking a little nervous. He didn't like having anyone in his kitchen, not even Odi.

Odi shrugged. "Whatever you say." Now he lowered his voice. "So...I'll meet you in the gardens...whenever you're through here. When do you think that might be?"

"At least an hour," Tai answered, quickly. After working all day, he was anxious to shower before socializing with the handsome bodyguard. As he began cleaning up the evening meal, his heart began to pound. He found he was looking forward to their date. It was the first time since coming to the penthouse that he had any sort of real social event planned. Although it was only to meet Odi in the gardens, Tai was rather excited at the prospect, and flattered that Odi had invited him. He finished up in the kitchen as quickly as he could, anxious to get ready for the evening ahead.

* * *

“Are you finished in there?” Omaki asked, when Ru returned to the great hall, having just finished applying a healing antiseptic to the boy’s punished flesh.

Ru nodded. “He wasn’t too happy about it.”

“Yes. I heard.” Omaki rose and, stopping briefly outside Aki’s room, sighed when he heard the pathetic sobbing within.

Slowly he opened the door. Aki was lying face down on his bed, his pants still pulled down to his knees, his skin an angry, welting red. When Aki saw him he cried a bit louder, as if to emphasize his distress.

“Now now. It’s over now, Aki.”

“It still hurts,” the boy protested, whimpering.

“I’m sure it does.” Now Omaki sat down on the bed next to him, reaching out to brush the boy’s hair out of his eyes. “But it can’t be as bad as you’re making it out to be.”

“It is as bad as I’m,” now Aki paused, trying to find the words, “making it up to be.”

Omaki smiled. “Well then. Perhaps now you’ll stay away from the sixth floor.”

Aki nodded, miserable. “I will. I HATE the sixth floor.” He punctuated his brief, but passionate diatribe against the sixth floor with a punch to his pillow.

“I’m glad to hear it.” Now the Blondie began wiping Aki’s tears away with a damp cloth he had brought for that purpose. “If you can stop crying for a bit, I want to talk to you about a few things. Then you can go back to crying when I’m finished.”

“I wasn’t crying,” Aki retorted, defensively.

“Now, Aki. It’s silly to try and deny the obvious. You need to learn to pick your battles. I’ve just wiped the tears from your face after listening to you sobbing in here for the last hour. Of course, there’s nothing unusual about a little boy crying after being spanked. Though Commander Aki, I’m sure, never cries.”

At this, Aki giggled. “He doesn’t cry,” he agreed, then added. “And I’m not a little boy.”

“No? But...how would I know that? You seem to be acting like a little boy, first disobeying me and then carrying on so after being punished. Or are you only pretending to be a little boy?”

Aki quieted, considering this rather grave affront to his dignity with alarm, his tears instantly ceasing.

“That’s better. I have something rather important to talk to you about, Aki.”

The boy was all ears, his eyes widening. “What is it?” he asked, a little nervously.

“I suppose I should just come right out and say this. Aki, you should be honored. Iason Mink has decided that he will be your Guardian. So you will be going to go live with him until you are of age.”

Confused and horrified with this news, Aki struggled to fight back tears, desperate not to start crying again. “Is it because I’m so naughty?” he asked, sadly.

Omaki smiled. “No, Aki. In fact, it is because I am naughty. You see, I wanted you for my pet, and I intended to raise you myself. But that’s not allowed. Jupiter is making me find another home for you until you are of age. And so I asked Iason, who I believe is the best person to take care of you, if he would be your Guardian. And he agreed.”

“But...I don’t want to leave you,” Aki pleaded.

Omaki closed his eyes, struggling with his own emotions. “I don’t want you go either, Aki. But we have no choice. Jupiter commands it.”

“I hate Jupiter!” Aki screamed.

At this, Omaki covered his mouth, leaning down close to him. “You must NEVER say that, Aki,” he said sternly. “Do you understand? That is very dangerous.”

“But Jupiter is making me go away!” Aki wailed, his voice muffled by Omaki’s hand.

“Just for a few years. And Aki, I will come and see you all the time. Any time you want me to come.”

“But...but,” now Aki paused, trying to find the words to express the horror of this new development, “but he doesn’t have ANY slides!”

At this the great Blondie threw back his head and laughed. “Well, perhaps he will build you one. Or you can ask if you can come back to visit me at the Tower.”

Insufficiently consoled by this, the boy now looked decidedly depressed, staring vacantly ahead.

“Just think. Now you can feed the fish every day.”

This revelation managed to produce a glimmer of interest in Aki’s golden eyes.

“Iason’s going to give you a party to celebrate your coming into his household,” Omaki continued.

At this, Aki perked up a bit more. “A party?”

“A party.” Omaki leaned forward. “With presents.”

The boy smiled, starting to feel a little better about this rather alarming news.

“And...how could I forget? Iason will have a special guest when you arrive. Who do you suppose that could be?”

“I don’t know!” Aki yelled. “Who is it?”

Now the Blondie smiled. “Commander Khosi.”

This information was almost too much for the poor boy to absorb. “Commander Khosi?” he screamed.

“Hush, Aki. Yes. Commander Khosi. Iason seemed to think you might enjoy that. Was he right?”

“I’m going to meet...Commander Khosi?” Aki repeated, in disbelief.

“If all goes according to plan, then yes. The Commander is staying with Iason next week during the trade convention. So now you will get a chance to see his soldiers up close.”

Aki’s estimation of Iason Mink had risen tremendously with this revelation, and now the prospect of going to live with him seemed almost bearable. In fact, in his heart, the boy was quite excited--at least about meeting the Commander.

“And you’ll...come and see me, whenever I want?”

“All the time. Iason will be quite tired of seeing me.”

Aki thought about this for a moment. “I’d still rather stay with you,” he said, finally. As excited as he was about the prospect of meeting Commander Khosi, he would willingly sacrifice it just to stay with the Master he loved.

Omaki smiled. “Come now. You wouldn’t want to miss the chance to meet your hero, would you?”

Now Aki looked up at Omaki with wide, tear-filled eyes. “But Master. You’re my hero, too.”

“Aki,” Omaki sighed, his heart about to burst from love and sadness. He forced himself to smile again for the boy. “That’s very good of you to say. But, this will be better for you. You’ll be going to the Elite Academy. You might have a little catching up to do, and you’ll have to study a bit harder than you did with Ru. But it will be a good experience for you. Lots of parties and whatnot, I’m sure.”

Now Aki wasn’t at all thrilled with the prospect of going to the Elite Academy, instinctively feeling that, parties and whatnots aside, it could hardly compare to his current carefree existence in the Taming Tower. He scrunched his nose, eliciting a laugh from Omaki.

“I take it you’re not as excited about going to the Academy? I suppose I can hardly blame you. I wasn’t much of a student, myself. And I should warn you, Aki, to be on your best behavior. Those headmasters won’t hesitate to punish you if you misbehave.”

“Were you ever punished?” Aki asked.

“Oh yes. My yes.” Omaki laughed. “Many a time. I couldn’t seem to stay out of trouble. After each thrashing I’d swear to reform, but then some other temptation would pop up, some trick I couldn’t resist playing on someone, and then I’d be back in the headmaster’s chambers again.”

Aki smiled at this imagery, then giggled at the thought of his Master being disciplined.

“Oh, you find that funny, do you?” the Blondie said with mock sternness, leaning down with his hands frozen in the air, poised to tickle the boy.

“No!” Aki screamed. “Don’t tickle me!”

“Oh, but it’s so hard to resist tickling little boys who look so cute when they scream.”

“I can’t help it if I’m cute! I’m not cute on purpose!”

“Oh very well. Then I will have mercy on you...this time. How is your bottom feeling now, Aki?”

“Better,” Aki smiled.

“Good. Because whenever you’re feeling up to it, I was wondering if you’d like to walk with me down to the Confectionary for some frozen creams.”

At this, Aki leapt up and tugged his pants up, though wincing a bit. “I’m ready now,” he proclaimed.

“I’m glad to hear it. Then, go wash your face and put on your shoes. But first...give me a hug, my little love.”

The boy threw himself into Omaki’s arms, clinging to him. “I love you Master,” he whispered. “And I will always always love you. No matter where I am.”

Wrapping his arms around the boy’s tiny form, Omaki marveled how he could feel so much love for someone so small. “And I will always love you, Aki,” he replied, closing his eyes and wishing the moment would never end.

* * *

Tai stepped out onto the balcony, zipping up his jacket. The night was cool, but not unpleasant. Stars already gleamed in the indigo sky, the twin moons rising, now waxing. Petals from the weeping cherry, planted out of season, whirled around him, seeming strangely out of place in the early winter breeze. It had snowed earlier that afternoon, but only briefly. Now the weather was clear again, as if not quite resigned to the changing season, clinging for a few last days to the remnants of autumn.

Odi had been waiting for some time, sitting on the stone bench near the fish pond.

“Is this too cold for you?” he asked, as Tai approached him.

“I’ll be fine, for awhile. Although I admit I’m not accustomed to the cold.”

Now Odi smiled. “This is nothing. Wait until the dead of winter--that’s when it gets so cold your thoughts start freezing together.”

Tai shivered, not wanting to think about it. He missed Aristia dreadfully, especially now; missed his daily swims in the ocean, and the warm, idyllic weather. He eyed the garden with concern. “What’s going to happen to all this? Won’t this weather kill the flowers?”

Odi nodded. “I remember Katze saying something about a retractable awning of some sort. He was telling Juthian that once it got cold enough, he’d have to be sure and release it.”

Tai studied the sides of the penthouse, wondering. “Don’t you think we ought to find that? These flowers,” he pointed to a bed of dropping heads, “don’t look too happy.”

Odi shrugged. “I don’t know where it is.”

Now Tai caught sight of a small panel on the walls, in one of the corners. “What about that?”

Nodding, Odi got up and they both went to examine it. It appeared to control the sprinkler system and the heating and pump system of the pond.

“Maybe this is it,” Tai said, pointing to the Open/Closed switch on the panel, which was currently set to Open.

Odi smiled. “What if it does something else?”

Tai shrugged. “Then we’d just flip it back?”

“All right then. Here we go.” Odi flipped the switch. Immediately, with a loud hum, a transparent awning emerged from the top of the penthouse, curving slowly down to stop at the balcony ledge, where it sealed with a rather impressive hiss.

Tai smiled. “You can still see the stars through it...and the city, down below.”

“Pretty cool, huh. Looks like we activated the heating system, too,” he said, pointing to the blinking red light above the thermostat. “So it should start warming up soon.”

“Good.” The Aristian shivered again, unable to help himself.

“You’re cold,” Odi whispered, stepping behind him, and putting his arms around him. “How about I try to warm you up.”

His heart beating a little faster, Tai didn’t resist Odi’s advances, rather enjoying the closeness. And, with the handsome bodyguard behind him, he didn’t have to look directly at him.

“You’re still shivering,” Odi whispered in his ear. “Or are you trembling?”

Swallowing, Tai made no reply.

Encouraged by his silence, Odi began to move his hands down the boy’s body.

Tai gasped, feeling horribly conflicted. He rather liked the feel of Odi’s hands on his body...but at the same time felt a little uncertain about what was happening so early into their date. He reached out and grabbed hold of the bodyguard’s hand, staying him.

“I’m sorry,” Odi whispered. “I’m moving too fast for you, aren’t I?”

“Yes,” Tai admitted.

“Then I’ll stop,” Odi said, reluctantly, though he continued to stand behind him. “But I can hardly help myself. You turn me on something awful.” Now he pressed himself up against him. “Can you feel that?”

“Yes!” Tai cried, suddenly moving away.

“I’ve frightened you.”

Tai shook his head, though he was, in fact, terrified.

“You...you’re a virgin, aren’t you?”

Ashamed, Tai bowed his head, nodding.

“That’s nothing to be embarrassed about. In fact...that rather intrigues me.” Now Odi smiled, gesturing to the stone bench. “Why don’t we sit down?”

Tai nodded, grateful for Odi’s understanding.

“So. Explain to me how someone as good looking as you is still a virgin?”

Tai blushed, shaking his head. “I am not...good looking. But I am still a virgin because...for a long time, I was marked to be a

priest in the temple of Armah. You cannot be a priest unless you come into service untouched. But,” Tai continued, sadly, “I cannot be a priest.”

“Why not?”

“Because...I love food too much.”

At this Odi laughed. “Well, you certainly are an incredible chef.”

Tai smiled. “Thank you. But...a priest can have no attachments to pleasures of the body. His mind must be completely focused on Armah so that he can interpret his messages correctly. A priest only eats enough to stay alive.”

“I see. And...perhaps you liked other pleasures too much, too?” Odi asked, with a knowing smile.

Blushing, the Aristian closed his eyes. “Yes,” he whispered. “I enjoy...other things...far too much.”

“Well, Armah certainly didn’t equip you to be a priest,” Odi replied, laughing.

“Yes. But...I was not always...like this. And I have wanted to be a priest since I was a little boy.”

“Ah. And then...as you matured, you found your body had other ideas?”

Tai nodded, smiling. “I could not stop touching myself. But not only that...I was raised in the palace of Prince Ruu of Aristia, who is my cousin--”

“Wait. Your cousin is a prince? Doesn’t that make you...something?”

“It made me Ruu’s chef,” Tai replied, smiling. “I am one of countless cousins. But I got to live in his palace, and I used to play in the kitchens. And then it turned out...I had a special gift when it came to food preparation.”

“I’ll say. But this sounds more like you wanted to be a chef than a priest.”

Tai looked away, saying nothing.

“So...your father wanted you to be a priest, is that it?”

Tai nodded. "I was pledged to Armah from birth." Now he bowed his head. "I have failed, and dishonored my family."

Odi was silent for a moment as he pieced together the entire story.

"I get it. Your father wanted you to be a priest. You really wanted to be a chef. Then...something happened?"

Blushing, Tai nodded. "My father caught me one day. When I was...was," now the Aristian paused, looking embarrassed.

"When you were...doing something?" Odi smiled.

Relieved, Tai nodded. "He was so angry he sent me to Amoi for penance."

Now Odi threw his head back and laughed. "I see. So, Amoi is where they send Aristians for penance? It's that bad here, is it?"

"It is not nearly as bad as I feared. But...it is...cold."

"You're lucky he didn't send you to Alpha Zen, then."

Tai nodded, laughing. "He threatened to, but I knew he wouldn't, really. Not with everything that was going on there, with the Commander and all."

"So, how does Iason's penthouse compare to the Prince's palace?"

"It is different...as far as architecture and all, and of course it is not nearly as big, but it is just as comfortable. In fact, I rather prefer it here, because I have the entire kitchen to myself."

"Then...you've given up on being a priest, is that right?"

"Yes."

Now Odi smiled. "Good." Then the bodyguard leaned forward, his intentions clear. "Do you want me to stop?"

Tai shook his head.

Slowly, Odi kissed the boy, his tongue exploring his mouth in languid circles, as he ran his hand through Tai's soft, dark hair. The Aristian closed his eyes, submitting to the myriad sensations coursing through his body. It seemed as though time itself stopped, and space dropped away, and they were floating away in some netherland, such was the power of that kiss.

Finally, Odi broke away. "Can I take you to my bed tonight?" he whispered.

"I'm...I'm not ready...yet," Tai apologized.

Odi closed his eyes, nodding. "All right. But...I must confess...I'm about ready to burst."

Now Tai's gaze was drawn to the bodyguard's impressive bulge. "Do you...want me to...touch you?" he asked, timidly.

At this, a slow smile crept onto Odi's face as he began unzipping his pants. "Yes. I very much want you to touch me, Tai." Revealing his immense, completely erect organ, Odi repositioned himself on the bench, spreading his legs a little more, as Tai tentatively reached out to fondle him.

Odi gasped, closing his eyes.

"That's good, Tai. That's so good."

Swallowing, Tai adjusted himself as he continued to stroke the bodyguard. Odi moaned, relishing Tai's touch. The Aristian seemed to know exactly how to stroke him for maximum pleasure, which surprised him initially, and then excited him.

"Yes, Tai," he encouraged, breathless, then suddenly reached out and pulled the boy close to kiss him again. "Don't stop," he whispered, when Tai hesitated. He kissed him wildly, almost savagely. Breaking away, Odi threw his head back. "Keep going, Tai! I'm very close."

And then, his body stiffening as he arched his back, the bodyguard climaxed, his semen shooting out in impressively long arcs, droplets raining down on the stone footpath below. Tai watched in amazement, eyes wide, now rather uncomfortably aroused.

"Mercy," Odi whispered, shaking his head. "That was...amazing." He turned to appraise Tai and, immediately noting his arousal, smiled. "Why don't I do something to relieve you?"

"Well," Tai said, uncertainly, adjusting himself again.

"I know something you might like," Odi continued, running his hand down Tai's thigh to touch him. "How about I pleasure you with my mouth?"

Tai moaned, finding these words alone a source of arousal.

“Is that a yes?” Odi whispered, moving in front of him and crouching down. He waited for a moment, looking up at the dark-haired youth, the red highlights in Tai's hair shining a deep auburn in the moonlight. “Unzip your pants, Tai.”

Tai hesitated, not sure if he wanted to move forward, but his body decided the matter for him. With trembling fingers he fumbled with his zipper, releasing his rather formidable erection, which twitched erratically in his hand.

Smiling, Odi took him into his hand, and then with tantalizing lethargy, slowly swirled his tongue around the head of the boy's cock.

“Oh!” Unaccustomed to the stimulation, Tai raised his hands, feeling he wanted to do something with them, and then, almost instinctively, grabbed onto Odi's head. He gasped as the bodyguard continued, ruthlessly taking him down a path of pleasure to a place the boy had never before been. His moans and rather strange body twitches were not lost on Odi, who was enjoying the Aristian's reactions to his first session of fellatio.

His breath now entirely consisting of gasps as he cried out with increasing urgency, Tai was experiencing pleasure he never even knew was possible. As he watched his length disappear into the bodyguard's mouth, he began to moan. Odi pleased him for a few more moments before Tai could no longer hold back.

“I'm...I'm...it's coming,” he whispered, almost panicked. “It's coming, Odi.”

The bodyguard continued his descent; then, with a deliberately slow suck, withdrew, as Tai ejaculated into his mouth. Without fully meaning to, Tai cried out, his voice a strangled sex-cry as he tried, rather unsuccessfully, to stifle his vocalization. Closing his eyes, the Aristian enjoyed what could only be described as the single most satisfying orgasm of his life. Masturbating was nothing compared to this; now Tai realized what he had been missing.

When he opened his eyes he saw that Odi was looking up at him, smiling, wiping his mouth. "It sounded like you enjoyed that," he said, his eyes shining.

Tai nodded. "Oh yes. Very much."

Now Odi rose to sit beside him again on the bench. "That's just a taste of the pleasures we can share together, Tai," he whispered. "If you want to, that is."

Swallowing, Tai braved another look into the bodyguard's dark, mysterious eyes.

"You don't have to say anything. Just think about it. About what happened tonight. And what might happen...another night."

Odi leaned forward and kissed him on the cheek. "You look so innocent, the way you're staring at me with those big wide eyes. I feel as though perhaps I am corrupting you. Did I...push you too fast tonight?"

"A little," Tai conceded. "But...I wanted to. Though all this is very...new to me."

Odi nodded. "Then, next time I'll try to let you take the reins. It won't be easy though." Now he growled, then snapped his teeth together in a dramatic biting sound. "I want to eat you right up!"

Tai laughed at this, squealing a little as Odi grabbed him and bit his throat.

"Don't eat me," Tai begged, in mock terror.

"Oh very well. If you insist. I'll release you...this time."

With that, Odi let him go, and the two young men headed back inside the penthouse, laughing and teasing one another like boys.

* * *

Riki opened his eyes, surprised to be looking up at a clear blue sky. He looked around, suddenly remembering where he was.

It was already morning.

"Fuck." He sat up. Iason had already risen, allowing his pet to sleep in. Pulling a sheet around his nakedness, the mongrel trudged down the stairs to find out what was going on.

Everyone was at breakfast, and his entrance brought snickers and giggles. His sheet was wrapped so haphazardly around him that his penis was in full view.

“Riki,” Iason scolded. “That’s hardly appropriate attire for breakfast. Go and change.”

“I didn’t want to put on yesterday’s clothes, Master,” Riki protested.

“Go put on some fresh ones, then.”

“Can’t I have some coffee first?” he pleaded.

“Three strikes, pet.,” Iason said, rising. “Come over here.”

Scowling, Riki approached Iason, who had already whipped out his taming stick and was tapping it lightly against his hand.

“Palms on the table. Drop the sheet.”

“Then I’ll be naked!”

“That makes six strikes, pet. Can you not remember one simple command? You’re not covering anything anyway, with that sheet.”

Pouting, Riki reluctantly obeyed, placing his hands on the table. He avoided looking at anyone, feeling rather grumpy to begin the day with six strikes from his Master’s taming stick, naked and in front of the entire household. Especially after he had given Iason a nice long body massage the night before.

Iason delivered the strikes hard and fast, eliciting a few yelps and one loud cry. “There now. Do you think you can remember to address me properly now, Riki?”

“Yes Master,” Riki replied, rather miserably. Then a thought occurred to him. “Master! I didn’t finish all my smokes yesterday! I had two left; can I have them now?”

“No, pet. If you did not use them yesterday, they are forfeited.”

Riki stood still for a long moment, glaring at Iason, who looked back at him coolly. He continued to tap the taming stick against his glove, a smile on his lips, as though waiting for him to protest this injustice.

Although Riki longed to tell Iason exactly what he thought of being swindled out of two cigarettes, his backside burned terribly, and he was rather unenthusiastic about more punishment. So, with

uncharacteristic submission, he bowed his head and then bent to retrieve his sheet, wrapping it around him as he retired to his room to dress.

Iason watched him go, a little surprised, but pleased, that Riki had not made an issue about the smokes.

In fact, Riki was furious. And a bit...depressed. If he'd forfeited his smokes by not using them, had he also forfeited his session with Iason? The mongrel was desperate to tie Iason up and punish him so severely the Blondie would be begging for mercy. And now he was afraid to ask about it.

He stepped into the shower, trying to quell his anger. As the water poured down his body, he closed his eyes, imagining Iason tied to the bed, his body covered with the marks of discipline, crying out with every strike of the kasey, and then the paddle, and then...the G-strap, and then....

"Pet, please," Iason whispered. "Please stop."

"Why should I show you any mercy? You gave none to me," Riki replied, with a devilish smile, whipping his arm back to bring the G-strap down on his buttocks with a sharp crack.

"Please!"

"What did I tell you! Call me Master! I'm going to teach YOU what it means to be punished. Tonight you're MY pet."

Crack!

Iason cried out, his muscles stiffening. "Please...Master!"

"Fuck yeah!" Riki cried, pumping himself faster, groaning as he felt his ascent, and then he was there, his semen spraying against the shower wall, where it was quickly washed away.

Feeling a little better, he proceeded to soap up and then get dressed, arriving back at the breakfast table just as everyone was leaving.

"Go ahead and eat, pet. We've got to take Daryl to the hospital now."

"But I wanna go!" Riki cried, then added, head bowed, "Master."

“Very well. Grab something to take with you. You can eat on the way.”

“Don’t be nervous,” Katze whispered into Daryl’s ear.

Daryl was visibly shaking.

“It’ll be okay, love. Just wait and see.”

Daryl nodded, leaning back against his lover, who was standing behind him and holding him tight.

“Tai!” Riki whispered, panicked. “Is there any coffee left?”

“I’m sorry, Sir Riki,” Tai replied. “It is gone. It will take me a few minutes to make it.”

“We don’t have time to wait,” Iason said. “Let’s go.”

Riki was so annoyed about being deprived of his morning coffee, he forgot to secure anything to take with him for breakfast, and only as they got into the vehicle did he realize his.

He sighed, his head falling back against the seat. He was famished and his head ached, not to mention his backside. The day was off to a rather inauspicious start.

Iason looked over at him. “What is it, pet?” he asked, concerned. “Are you ill?”

Riki shook his head, feeling disinclined to discuss the matter with him at the moment.

The Blondie smiled, suspecting that his pet was pouting after being punished.

In the back seat, Katze had his arms around Daryl, whispering soothing encouragement into his ear. Poor Daryl was so frightened about the approaching surgery that he couldn’t stop shaking.

“You’re going to be fine,” Katze whispered. “This will be much better than those horrible units, right?”

Daryl nodded.

“I received a call from Xian Sami this morning,” Iason announced. “He’s sending Toma to us to replace Juthian. He should be easy to train, Katze.”

Katze nodded. “You do realize he’s a notorious gossip.”

“Yes. There’s little I can do about that, other than punish him if I hear about it.”

“My understanding is he was punished plenty at the Sami estate, and that didn’t stop him.”

“Wonderful. Now we’ll have two members of the household completely unresponsive to discipline,” Iason said, looking pointedly at Riki, who glowered back.

“You could always get a brand new Furniture,” Katze suggested.

Now the Blondie sighed. “We haven’t the time for the training. With the Commander coming next week, and Aki as well, I need someone who’s able, and who can take charge of an eight-year old. Before Xian, Toma was apparently the eldest of a large family in Midas, managing six brothers and sisters.”

Riki found he was starting to feel a bit ill. He’d hardly had any dinner the night before, and then he’d been deprived of two smokes--from an already drastically reduced regimen--and then he’d had no coffee and no breakfast. At least Iason drove smoothly; Riki was grateful Katze wasn’t driving. He wasn’t able to keep his mind on the conversation, and as they approached the hospital, he was

surprised when Iason grabbed hold of his chin, demanding his attention.

“Are you going to answer me?” Iason demanded. “I asked if you were ill.”

“Just hungry, Master.” Riki muttered.

“Didn’t you bring something to eat?”

“No...Master.”

“Didn’t I tell you to do so?”

“Yes, Master...but then I was bummed out when there was no coffee and...I forgot.”

Now Iason sighed. “We may well be at the hospital for a few hours. You’re going to get very hungry.”

“Great,” Riki groaned, sliding down in his seat.

“I’m sure they have food there somewhere,” Katze said, as Iason pulled to a stop in front of the hospital, in the no-parking zone. “Let’s get Daryl checked in, and then we’ll take care of you.”

Feeling too queasy to reply, Riki only nodded. As he got out of the car, a cool, fresh breeze washed over him, making him feel a little better. The moment was ruined with he saw Iason approach him, chains in hand. Riki had failed to notice that the Blondie had brought the chains, as he'd put them in the back seat with Daryl's things.

He cursed silently, but knew better than to try and resist. With annoying casualness, Iason cuffed him, chaining his pet to his own arm. Riki looked down as he walked, feeling humiliated. It seemed everyone was staring at them, and this wasn't just in the mongrel's mind. The Blondie so rarely brought his pet out into public, he always drew attention when he did so.

They made their way inside the building. Riki's eyes immediately gravitated to the statue of Iason he knew would be there. As soon as the Blondie stepped into the building, he was fawned over, everyone calling out greetings to him. Raising one hand as if to acknowledge all this attention with a single motion, Iason continued on to the elevator without stopping to talk to anyone.

They headed up to Reconstruction. The elevator made a stop on the way up, and who should step inside but the blue-haired lady from the floor where Daryl had made his recovery.

Katze poked Daryl in the side and Daryl desperately tried not to laugh as the blue-haired lady looked at Iason and then, suddenly realizing who he was, straightened, looking rather excited.

"Oh! Sir Iason. I almost...didn't recognize you," she began. "You remember me, don't you?"

Annoyed, Iason managed to stifle a sigh as he directed his gaze to the woman. A moment's consideration placed her, and he bowed, graciously. "Of course, Madam. And how are you?"

"Goodness! I am...well, it's extraordinary to see you! Quite extraordinary! Of all the extraordinary things! I was just telling my friend, Zusa of that extraordinary day when--"

"This is our floor," Iason interrupted, smooth as cream. "But it was so good to see you again."

With that, the Blondie exited the elevator as Daryl and Katze struggled to keep from laughing.

"He should have said it was extraordinary to see her again," Katze whispered, sending Daryl into stitches.

Iason glanced back at them, the disapproving look on his face alerting them that the Blondie did not approve of mirth in hospitals.

"Sorry, Master," Daryl said, meekly.

Riki trudged along, rather put out. He now wished he'd chosen not to come to the hospital, if it meant he was going to be chained the whole time.

Heiku greeted them as they entered the floor, managing to capture the mongrel's interest. Riki was fascinated with the Blondie's bionic arm, its mechanical gears and wheels visibly moving beneath the transparent shell that covered his artificial limb.

"Iason. Right on time. Now we'll have," Heiku looked at his palm computer, "Daryl--get prepared. We'll need to run a few quick scans. Then we should be ready to begin surgery at precisely 8:21."

Iason smiled at this. "I'm in your debt, Heiku," he replied.

"Yes I know. I'll remember that," the Blondie teased.

Heiku left, returning just a few minutes later. "Everything looks okay. Except for one thing." Now he looked at Katze. "There is a rather alarming level of G-residuals in his system. You wouldn't know anything about that, would you?"

Shocked, Katze's eyes widened. "Yes," he admitted. "We might have been...that is, we were using G-devices."

Heiku nodded. "I thought so."

"What's this?" Iason demanded.

"They're imports. Illegal, I might add," Heiku said with a smile. "Used to produce an orgasm-like experience in castrated males."

"I see," Iason said, looking over at Katze.

Katze shook his head. "I knew those were dangerous. This is my fault."

"Now, I doubt you forced him to orgasm. Am I wrong? At any rate, we have a procedure that can remove the residuals this time. But--and this is very important--you absolutely cannot use G-wave

devices with a synthetically grown kidney.” Now Heiku nodded at Iason. “That goes for G-straps, too--any device that emits G-waves.”

“Yousi said it would have no effect on--” Iason began, then fell silent.

Now Heiku and Iason shared a long look. “Yousi is not always correct about things...these days.”

Nodding, Iason turned to Katze. “I expect you to turn over those devices when we return home.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“You’re very lucky,” Heiku continued. “If you had experimented with those, even one more time, he may not have survived.”

Devastated by this news, Katze kept his head bowed.

“Although I can’t say I blame you. I’m sure I’d do the same thing, if I was in your position,” the Blondie said, kindly.

Katze nodded, but remained silent.

“The surgery should only take about an hour, but he’ll have a long recovery. You probably won’t want to stay the entire duration. Then he’ll be in recovery for a good seven hours before he wakes, and that will only be for a few moments. Probably you should just call me in about an hour and plan on coming back later today.”

Now Katze turned to Iason. “I want to stay,” he pleaded.

“Me too,” Riki added. “Can I stay too, Master?”

Iason sighed. “Very well. You may both stay. I’ll come back around sundown to pick Riki up.”

Now the Blondie’s attention was diverted by a familiar low voice as Raoul walked into the waiting room, followed by Yui. Iason released his arm cuff, handing it to his pet.

“Stay here with Katze, Riki,” he said, and then walked toward the Blondie.

Raoul looked rather startled to see Iason and for a moment simply stood there, gaping at him as he approached.

“Raoul,” Iason said, softly. “Heiku said you were coming today. I must confess, I hardly believed it.”

“Yes,” Raoul replied, blushing. “I imagine you were surprised.”

“Surprised...is not quite the word I’d use. More like astounded.” Now Jason’s gaze shifted to Yui, who was looking up at him with unveiled jealousy.

Jason laughed softly. “I see. Then...it’s all true.”

“Jason,” Raoul began, then, unable to decide what to say, fell silent.

“I wish you all the best,” the Blondie said, his eyes glimmering. “Perhaps...you and I might understand one another a little better now, Raoul.”

Hesitating for a moment, Raoul nodded. “Yes.”

“I’m glad I saw you here. I’d like to invite you to a party next week, on Jupiter’s Eve. For Aki, my new charge. I’ve decided to be his Guardian.”

Looking rather puzzled at this, Raoul shook his head. “Aki...isn’t that Omaki’s pet?”

“He was too young to be a pet,” Jason replied. “Omaki asked me if I would take him after Jupiter demanded he let the boy go.”

“I see.”

“We’ll also have a private pet auction, if you’re interested. Jupiter’s Eve at dusk. Bring Yui, if he’s able,” Jason said, his gaze pausing briefly on the boy’s face. He smiled. “Though I must say, he doesn’t look too happy to see me.”

Now Raoul turned. “Yui,” he said, sharply.

Yui immediately put on a more agreeable, obedient face, bowing. “Forgive me, Master,” he murmured.

Raoul offered a small smile of apology for Yui’s behavior, which Jason dismissed with a slight laugh. “Then, until we next meet.”

“Until then.”

Now the Blondie, feeling strangely affected by his encounter with Raoul, simply left the building without saying goodbye to Katze or Riki.

Riki watched him leave, puzzled. “Is he coming back?”

Katze shrugged.

“What’s Raoul doing here?”

Now Katze leaned close to whisper in his ear. "He's having Yui restored."

"What does that mean...restored?"

"It means he'll be a man again."

"Seriously?"

Katze nodded. "But you can't tell anyone."

"And Jupiter...is allowing this?"

"No. That's why you need to keep a tight lip about it. Heiku's really going out on a limb to do it."

"No shit?" Now Riki sighed. "Bloody hell. I can't believe he just left. I still haven't eaten anything or had coffee or," now he realized with horror, "had any smokes! He left without giving me any smokes!"

"Well, there's probably a cafeteria or something. You can get some breakfast."

"Katze," Riki pleaded. "Please give me a smoke. You can tell Iason you did and he'll subtract it from my allowance."

"Well...I'm not supposed to give you smokes, but I suppose under the circumstances, if I tell him, it'd be okay."

"I love you forever," the mongrel replied, grabbing the proffered smoke from his hand.

"But you can't smoke that inside. You'll have to go outside."

"No problem. I'm going down now."

"Come right back," Katze warned.

Riki nodded. "Hey. Can I take these chains off, do you think? Since Iason's not with us now?"

"Yeah, okay. Just leave the collar on, though."

Thrilled to be relieved of the weight and humiliation of the chains, Riki headed toward the elevator.

"Riki," Katze called after him. "Be sure you come right back. I'm trusting you."

Riki answered this with a grin and a salute, thrilled to finally be getting his morning smoke. As soon as he was outside, he lit up, groaning as he enjoyed his first smoke since the previous afternoon.

As he smoked, he noticed the coffee & tea shop across the street, and decided to run there and get some brew, and maybe something to eat. He entered the shop, his eyes immediately gravitating to the stand of Dark Baccalias. Suddenly he remembered that he still had the paper credits Iason had given him. There was nothing to stop him from buying a pack now.

With trembling fingers, he bought three packs of smokes, a large coffee, and a bag of cream-filled krevlians. He immediately lit up another smoke, and then hid the others in his inside jacket pocket. Of course, Iason would punish him severely if he found out what he'd done, but he didn't care. It was worth it.

Riki sighed as he waited to cross the street when a thought occurred to him.

A wonderful, amazing thought.

He was not wearing his pet ring. Without his ring, there would be no way to trace him.

His heart pounding, the mongrel suddenly turned and began walking away from the hospital. He didn't know exactly where he was going or what he was doing. He only knew that, for the first time since coming to Eos, he had a real opportunity to escape his life as the sex slave of Iason Mink, to escape the constant punishment of a Blondie intent on taming that which could never be tamed.

And to once again be truly free.

TAMING RIKI

VOLUME 1 - PART 3

問
の
楔



きら たけのうち

KIRA TAKENOUCHI

A Darker Dream

Riki walked faster, suddenly feeling anxious. Then he stopped, hesitating. Perhaps he should go back. There was still time; Katze wouldn't miss him yet. Was he really going to walk away from Iason, just like that? He'd probably be caught; after all, where could he go where Iason couldn't find him? His reach extended everywhere. The mongrel shivered when he imagined how the Blondie would punish him for running away.

"Out of the way, pet," a Blondie ordered, sharply. Riki moved aside to let him pass, wondering how the Blondie knew he was a pet. Then he remembered that he still wore his collar, engraved with Iason's initials. With shaking fingers, he zipped up his jacket to cover it, then continued walking.

If he was going to do this, he needed to act fast. And he needed to get out of the city of the Elites. But...he couldn't very well hide in Midas, either; Iason had contacts there, as well as the Midas Police. And he couldn't return to Ceres, not after what he'd done to Bison. He could make for Urus; but he knew that once Iason put out an alert for him, there was nowhere he could hide. And he'd never even been to Urus.

There wasn't time to leave Amoi; by the time he secured a seat, an alert would be out for sure. Anyway, where would he go? The only language he knew was Amoi.

Although....

Suddenly Riki had a thought; perhaps...he could hide out at Dana Burn, the old ruins from the revolution. A shudder passed through him as he recalled the rumors of its being haunted by the

dead who burned there; but surely such stories had no truth to them. When he was with Bison, they had occasionally dared one another to spend the night there alone, but there was always some excuse that prevented their ever doing so. In truth, Riki, like the others, had always been careful to stay clear of the place, having heard that it was truly one of the eeriest places on Amoi, and that the dead walked at night, and their moans could be heard echoing through the great underground structure.

As he thought about this, he could just hear Iason's laugh. "Pet. Surely you do not believe such foolishness." And then the Blondie would give some long-winded lecture on the ontology of phantoms, and how they were a scientific impossibility.

Feeling ironically comforted by this imaginary conversation with his master, Riki now felt bold enough to brave at least one night at the ruins. The question now was how to get there. His eyes gravitated to the store window he was passing, and there, by pure chance, he beheld his answer in the window display: a hover-bike.

Encouraged by this, and feeling almost as though he were being helped by some kind, supernatural force, Riki slipped inside and immediately hailed the attendant.

"I'll take that bike," he said, pointing to the display.

The attendant, a Tanagura native named Goda with dark violet hair, appraised him for a moment, looking rather unenthusiastic about helping him.

"Did you hear me?" Riki demanded.

"We don't serve mongrels," he replied, gifting him with a look of utter disdain.

Now Riki unzipped his jacket, his golden collar immediately catching the attendant's notice.

"My master will be very displeased that you refused to wait on me," he answered.

Seeing the initials on the collar, the attendant suddenly seemed alarmed. "Are you Iason Mink's pet?"

"Yes." Riki smiled.

“Forgive me.” Goda stepped forward, his manner completely altered. “Yes, of course. As Iason’s pet, you’re most welcome here. Ah...yes...the 6500 Supernova. This just came in from Xeron. She’s a beauty, isn’t she? And she’s fast. In fact--”

“Are these temperature controlled?” Riki interrupted, pointing to the storage compartments beneath the seat.

“Of course. And they’re independent, so you can have one heated and the other cooled.”

“Fine. I’ll take it. And...a helmet. That one.” Riki pointed randomly to the first one he saw.

“I must say, you make your mind up very quickly,” the attendant laughed. “I only wish all my customers were as--”

“Do you have any generator heaters?”

“Ah. Yes, in fact, right over there.” He pointed to a display, and Riki quickly choose one, along with a pair of leather riding gloves, a lantern, an all-wave radio with interception capabilities, and a knife.

“I’ll have to speak with your master for permission to sell you that,” Goda warned, nodding to the knife.

“Oh.” Riki put it back on the display, shrugging. “Never mind, then. I don’t want to bother him with something so silly.”

Smiling, the attendant nodded. “Then...will this be all?”

“Yes.”

“Please put your chin on the rest here for a retinal scan.”

Riki did so, and for a tense moment both he and the attendant waited to see if such a huge purchase would clear. His ID immediately popped up, listing an open-ended credit portfolio of 500,000 credits, with no restrictions other than a 75,000 credit paper exchange.

Goda smiled. “Your master must think a lot of you. I don’t know that I’ve ever seen a pet with a portfolio like this.”

“Yeah,” Riki answered, feeling a little guilty.

“You still have plenty on your line.”

“Hey...can I get some paper credits?”

“Up to 75,000.”

“Great. I’ll take...75,000, then.”

“Certainly.” Goda eyed him curiously. “It’s odd you’d want paper credits, though. Why don’t you just use your credit line?”

“Oh...it’s mostly to impress the other pets. You know how they are. They’re more awed by wealth they can actually see.”

“I see. Then...here you are. And here are your keys; take the first one there, by the door. It’s fully charged. And...tell your master Goda Bandora sends his regards.”

“Sure.” Riki gave him a parting smile, then pushed his bike outside and started it up. His heart was pounding dreadfully as he got on it, put his helmet on, and took off.

He didn’t have much time. By now, Katze would be wondering where he was. But he still needed food and water. Stopping at the first place he saw, he rushed in but was immediately stopped by the store attendant.

“No pets,” he scolded. “Didn’t you read the sign?”

“Where can I go, then?”

“Around the corner, there’s a shop for pets. Cornucopia. Go on, get out.” He waved Riki away with his hand as though shooing away a bug.

“Bastard,” he muttered, as he left.

“What was that?” the shopkeeper called. “Hey! Who’s your master? Naughty pet!”

Riki jumped on his bike and sped off before the irate shopkeeper could accost him, stopping again at the shop he’d mentioned. Once again he rushed in, only to be confronted by yet another store attendant.

“Hey! No running! Bad pet!”

Ignoring this, Riki gathered as much food as he thought would fit in his bike storage, along with a case of Electrolyte. He quickly made his way to the check out, but had to stand in line behind two pretty female pets, who continually looked back at him, whispering to one another.

“Got something to say? Why don’t you just say it?” he said, finally.

“You look like a mongrel,” one replied, contemptuously. “Don’t stand so close to us.”

“Look at you,” he snorted. “Perched so high. As though you’re any better than me.”

“My master is Sir Xanthus, and she’s the pet of Sir Kobin,” she replied, arrogantly.

“Yeah? Well, I’m the pet of Iason Mink, and he can kick your masters’ asses any day or have them shipped out of Eos, whichever I tell him to do.”

Now the girls both fell silent, looking at him in disbelief. Their eyes fell to his collar and, seeing the initials there, they regarded him with horror.

“He IS Sir Iason’s pet,” one whispered.

“Please excuse us,” the other murmured. “We were terribly rude.”

“Yes, you were.”

“You won’t tell your master, will you?” the other pleaded.

“Oh, I’ll tell him,” he answered, leaning forward, “unless you both come with me right now and let me fuck you, one after the other. Plus one of you has to suck me, and I get to fuck you up the ass, too.”

The pets looked so horrified that Riki had to laugh.

“Nah, I’m just teasing. But you’d better be nicer to people you don’t know from now on.”

Frightened, the girls quickly paid for their merchandise and hurried out of the store.

The shop attendant glared at him. “I heard what you said to those pets,” he scolded. “That’s not appropriate conversation. I ought to call your master and let him know how you behaved in here, running through the store and then frightening those young girls.”

Riki shrugged. “Call him if you want. But he won’t be too pleased you bothered him with something so trivial. He’s got that Alpha Zen convention coming up, you know, and he could care less what I said to some arrogant little pet.”

The attendant then looked a little uncertain and rung up his order without further comment.

Riki left the store in an unhurried manner, stopping and pretending to look at an advertisement posted on the wall for nipple rings. In fact, he was quite anxious to get going, but he was a bit worried about the store attendant finding his behavior suspicious. He could feel his eyes burning on him as he stood there; finally, the attendant looked away and seemed absorbed in a magazine hologram, which was rotating a new series of A-class pets coming to auction.

Once he was outside, the mongrel immediately stored his purchases and sped off, making for the freeway. By now Katze was probably pissed; perhaps he had even gone to look for him, or had called Iason. Riki knew that his master would attempt to look for him privately first; if that failed, he would no doubt put an alert out for him, probably with a reward offered for his safe return. He knew he had to get to Dana Burn before that happened; Iason would check his purchase records and discover he'd just bought a new bike, and then everyone would be on the lookout for it.

Moving fast on the freeway, Riki began to shiver from the cold. Cursing, he realized he should have made one more stop for heavier clothing or blankets of some kind. He could tell from the overcast sky that it was going to snow. At least he'd bought the heater; he realized now he would truly need it.

Taking the exit to Urus, he turned off at the quarry, going cross-country toward the ruins. As he neared the impressive old structure of Dana Burn, he marveled at its beauty, feeling foolish now that Bison had never really explored it before. It would have been the perfect hangout, he realized now. And it was close to the ocean, too.

Feeling a bit excited, the mongrel pulled up just outside the structure and began looking for a way inside. That challenge was easily resolved when he discovered the door panel, but he was disappointed when he couldn't get the panel to take his code.

He shook his head, kicking himself. Of course his code wouldn't be recognized by something dating from the revolution. But how was he going to get inside?

He tried various combinations, including words such as "open" or "dana burn" or "override," to no avail.

"Fuck," he muttered. The wind was getting stronger now and the temperature was definitely dropping. Finally, on a whim, he entered, "freedom."

The door opened.

Thoroughly pleased with himself for cracking the code, he peered inside the dark interior. It was pitch black, and completely silent. Although he was anxious for some shelter from the razor-sharp chill of the wind, he found he was decidedly less enthusiastic about actually entering the old shelter, which almost seemed like a tomb. As this thought crossed his mind, he began to worry that there might still be human remains inside; what if it was filled with old skeletons or scary body parts, preserved by the airtight seal of the structure?

His teeth now chattering from the cold, he forced himself to think about other things, such as actually fucking the two arrogant pets he'd pet at Cornucopia, making them cry and apologize over and over. He returned to his bike and retrieved his lantern, turning it on. Its blue light came on smoothly and silently, and for a moment he was distracted by it, wondering how the lantern worked, for it seemed to have no energy source whatsoever.

Suddenly remembering that he still carried the laser Iason had given him, he took that out and slowly entered the building, holding up the lantern to light his path. He knew it was foolish to arm himself against the potential threat of animated skeletons or phantoms, but he felt better just carrying the weapon.

The lantern was surprisingly bright, and Riki could see further ahead than he had expected. All the same, he decided almost immediately that he didn't want to venture too deep inside; he'd settle in the first place he found that wasn't littered with skulls or anything that moved. He found such a room fairly quickly; it

housed a table a bed, and a few benches and chairs. Besides that, the room was surprisingly barren. Riki explored it for a few moments, thrilled when he found another light source, for the structure still had an intact, old-fashioned generator. Although the lights that flickered on still left the room bathed in shadows, it was certainly better than nothing. It was cold inside, but at least it was shelter from the elements. Riki returned to his bike and retrieved the rest of his supplies, setting up his camp. For awhile, this would be his home.

His thoughts drifted to Katze and he found that he felt a little guilty for the trouble he'd no doubt caused him. Katze's parting words, "I'm trusting you, Riki," now plagued him, and he fervently hoped that Iason would not be too hard on him.

By now, Iason certainly knew that his pet had disappeared. Riki instinctively shivered as he visualized his reaction to this news. He could imagine many different scenarios but in all of them one thing was the same: the Blondie's fury.

* * *

Katze stood up when the elevator opened, ready to scold Riki for taking so long in returning. When an orderly emerged instead, he turned away, scowling. He was now more than just annoyed with Riki. He was decidedly pissed. Riki was getting a taming when he returned. Three strikes--no, six.

As he stewed over this, his gaze drifted over to Raoul and Yui, who sat in the waiting room just across the hall. He was surprised at how gentle the Blondie seemed with his Furniture, leaning over to whisper to him. Yui looked terrified, clutching his master's sleeve uncertainly as Raoul reached down to brush a strand of hair from his eyes. This was hardly the same Blondie who had always rather intimidated Katze, the one who'd abducted Riki and hurt his precious Daryl.

He would never completely forgive Raoul for hurting Daryl. But at the same time, his respect for Elites was so ingrained in him that

it was difficult even to acknowledge feelings that ran contrary to societal expectations; his anger was detached from the rest of him, floating off in some isolated, impotent place, and though he was aware of it, he did not act on it. His demeanor towards Raoul would always be appropriate, just as he now submitted to Iason's every demand, with the occasional--though thankfully infrequent--lapse in judgment, such as when he agreed to perform fellatio on Riki or when he foolishly suggested Riki join he and Daryl for a much afterwards regretted threesome. In the grand hierarchy of castes that formed the social world on Amoi, Katze knew his place, and could not, now, even imagine anything different.

Katze cursed Riki again; he'd been gone at least a half hour, far longer than it took to smoke one cigarette. He decided he'd better go down and fetch him. He took the chains with him; Riki would definitely be putting those back on, and after he'd tamed him, Katze would chain him to himself. But when he reached the main level, the mongrel was not to be found. He walked outside, scanning the streets. No sign of Riki.

Frustrated, he tried the canteen, and then the gift shop, with no luck either place. He sighed. Perhaps he'd missed him, and Riki had already returned to the waiting room. He went back up to Reconstruction to find out.

Riki hadn't returned.

Katze sat down, starting to worry. Now he didn't want to search for him until he'd heard from Heiku; the doctor would be returning any moment with an update on how the surgery had gone. He waited anxiously, rather desperate for a smoke. What was Riki up to?

A thought was starting to take shape that the auburn-haired youth did not want to acknowledge. A dreadful thought. What if something had happened to him...or--perhaps more likely but equally alarming--what if Riki had decided to use the opportunity to run away?

"Dammit, Riki," he muttered under his breath.

He sighed. At least...he couldn't get far. He'd have to call Iason, though, to get his location, and he knew the Blondie would not be pleased that he'd allowed his pet to wander off. He'd be in for some punishment for sure.

Cursing, he stood up and began to pace, unable to remain still. Thankfully, Heiku returned to the waiting room at that moment.

Katze rushed over to him, anxious.

Heiku smiled. "He did just fine. No problems whatsoever. As I mentioned before, he'll be in recovery for a quite awhile--he probably won't wake until later this afternoon. You're welcome to sit with him in about an hour, but don't try to wake him up."

Katze nodded. "I'll come back in an hour, then."

Then Heiku excused himself, going over to talk with Raoul and Yui.

Relieved that the surgery had gone well, Katze was now furious with Riki. He dreaded telling Iason; if the Blondie was angry enough, he might even whip him again. The thought of enduring such a hellish experience again was enough to make him shake as he made the call to the Mink household.

"Iason Mink," came the silky soft, almost sultry reply.

"It's Katze. I'm sorry to bother you with this, but...Riki's gone."

"What do you mean, he's gone?" Iason demanded.

"I mean...I'm sorry but...I let him go downstairs to smoke about an hour ago, and he hasn't come back."

"What?" Iason yelled so loud that Katze nearly dropped the phone.

"I'm sorry. Can you pull up his tracer and find out where he is?"

A long silence followed as the Blondie digested this information, suddenly realizing that his pet was not wearing his ring. "Katze," he said, finally, his voice shaking with anger. "I left Riki in your hands. I certainly don't remember giving you permission to let him leave your sight."

"Yes, Sir," Katze murmured, fighting back his own anger.

“And now we most definitely have a problem. Riki’s not wearing his pet ring, so there’s no way to trace him.”

“Holy shit.” Riki wasn’t wearing his ring? This changed everything. A street-smart mongrel like Riki the Dark wouldn’t be easy to find without a tracer. But why wasn’t he wearing his pet ring? And why hadn’t Iason told him? “What about the tracer you gave him last week?”

“I already took that back from him.”

“We should put out an alert,” Katze suggested, finally.

“No.” Iason sighed, bringing a hand to his head as he tried to stave off an impending headache. “I want to try and handle this privately first. I’m sending the brothers to you--Odi, too. If the four of you can’t find him in one hour, I’ll issue an alert then.”

“Iason, I’m sorry--”

“Apologies aren’t necessary; you’ll be punished, Katze, whether you’re sorry or not.”

“Yes, Sir.” Katze was now so angry, he felt like throwing the phone.

“Find him.”

With that, Iason ended the transmission, furious. He was angry at Katze, and now he was dreadfully worried about Riki as he considered the possibilities. What if he had been taken by force?

He summoned Odi, Askel and Freyn and alerted them as to what had happened. The three bodyguards, finally having something serious to do, immediately moved into action. Odi flipped open his handheld database and brought up a holographic projection of the vicinity immediately around the hospital.

“He’s been gone an hour. Let’s divide this up into quadrants, moving inward from these points,” Odi said, indicating where he thought each of them should start out. “I’ll take this area, and you two take the southern points. Katze will start there, at the Old Tower.”

“We should take separate vehicles,” Askel suggested.

“Good idea.”

“Should I go, too?” Tai offered.

Odi looked to Iason.

“Yes, Tai. That would be helpful,” the Blondie replied, looking suddenly rather weary.

“Why don’t you come with me, then,” Odi added.

Tai nodded.

Now Odi hesitated. “I’m not sure if it’s such a good idea to leave you completely alone, Iason.”

The Blondie dismissed this with a wave of his hand. “Go. You’re wasting time just standing here.”

“Yes, Sir,” Odi answered, with a slight bow. The four of them hurried off, leaving the Blondie alone to his thoughts.

Iason was now starting to panic as the reality of his pet’s disappearance set in. He pulled up Riki’s purchase logs to see if any clues lay there, and was stunned to see that his pet had bought a bike, a heater, a lantern, and an all-wave radio with interception capabilities and had, in addition, taken out 75,000 credits in paper. He immediately called the store owner, Goda Bandora, who confirmed that Riki had come in alone, and that he had also expressed interest in purchasing a knife. Goda apologized profusely for selling Riki the bike once he was apprised of the situation, but in fact, with no restrictions listed on his portfolio, Goda was hardly to blame for doing so.

He ended the call, sitting back in his chair as he sorted out this new information. Now there was no question in his mind as to what had happened; Riki hadn’t been abducted--by all the evidence, it appeared he’d run away. He was furious with his pet, and also--perhaps even more so-- extraordinarily hurt, and puzzled. Only a few days ago, Riki had declared that he belonged with him. He’d even bought him a gift. So...what had happened?

He reviewed the morning; his pet had been tamed, true enough. But that was hardly anything new. Then, he had seemed ill in the car. Iason remembered then that he hadn’t eaten any breakfast, and that he’d been upset that there was no coffee. These seemed, to the Blondie, trivial concerns. Surely not cause to try and escape?

And...he hadn't even resisted when Iason put his chains on him, for once.

So then, why had he run away?

"Riki," he sighed. He reviewed his purchase logs again, noting that he'd bought a heater. Did that mean he expected to be outside? He gazed out the window, worried. There was a snowstorm coming. Surely his pet intended to find shelter. The thought of him shivering in an alley somewhere....

As angry as he was, Iason could not but help admire how clever his pet had been to ask for paper credits, and to make his purchases so quickly after deciding to run. In fact, the Blondie had just entered an alert on his portfolio to detain Riki, should he attempt to make further purchases, although he suspected now that his pet would not attempt to use his credit line for this very reason. Riki could live on 75,000 credits for quite some time; months, perhaps even years, depending on how frugal he was. And with the hover bike, he could go anywhere.

He called up Katze, who answered the phone anxiously, afraid that at any moment someone would contact him to demand a ransom.

"He's run away," Iason announced.

"You're sure?"

"He just bought a 6500 Supernova at Goda's Post, just down the street from the hospital."

"Shit."

"Odi, the brothers and Tai should be there soon. Check all the shops in that area to see if he made any other purchases with paper credits. He took out quite a sum so he may well have done so."

"All right."

Now Iason sighed. "Where do you think he'd go, Katze? Back to Ceres?"

"Possibly, although maybe not after what happened with Bison. He'd be smart to stay clear of there."

"But he won't find Tanagura too welcoming, either."

"Maybe somewhere else in Midas? Or even...Urus?"

“Do you really think he’d go that far?”

“I don’t know. But...you also might want to think about alerting the space port. I don’t think he’d leave Amoi, but you never know.”

Horried at this thought, Iason quickly ended the call and contacted the port to be sure his pet hadn’t arrived there and ensure that if he did, he’d be immediately apprehended. Satisfied that Riki hadn’t tried to leave Amoi, the Blondie now found his emotions oscillating wildly between worry and anger as he contemplated his pet’s actions.

He comforted himself with the knowledge that his pet would surely eventually be found. One thing he knew for sure: Riki would most certainly be punished. The Blondie found some distraction entertaining how that would be accomplished; his pet would feel the full force of his wrath. Iason would neither spare his arm nor his tongue, and before he was finished with him, Riki would sorely regret this most egregious act of disobedience.

Though Iason tried to keep his mind on Riki’s punishment, he found instead his thoughts shifting to his worries and fears for his pet, who he felt certain was somewhere out on the streets, alone and cold. And although he knew the street-smart mongrel could take care of himself, his master was nevertheless worried about his safety, especially as he had recently made a few enemies in Ceres. He could not help but recall how he’d first met his pet. This time, should something similar happen, he wouldn’t be there to save him.

* * *

“It’s almost time, Yui,” Raoul whispered, when he saw Heiku speaking with Katze. “Are you ready?”

“Yes,” Yui answered, softly. He was frightened, but he was also excited. Soon he would be sexually complete, able to respond to his master’s touch. “Master?”

“Yes?”

“Thank you for this.”

Raoul smiled. "It will give me nearly as much pleasure as it gives you, Yui."

Heiku approached them, smiling. "We're ready for you now." He turned to Raoul. "As I told you, this procedure is a bit tricky, so it will take a good two to three hours. Then he'll be in recovery for about six hours. He'll need to spend a few nights here. After that, his recovery will depend on which route you want to take. Have you decided?"

"Yes," Raoul replied. "We'll go the natural route. No acceleration."

"Very well. Then it will probably be about six weeks before he's sexually functional."

Now Yui, who had not been consulted about this, tugged on Raoul's sleeve.

"Yes, Yui?" Raoul asked, smiling.

"If we choose acceleration, how long will it take before...I'm ready?"

"About a week," Heiku answered. "But the treatments are very painful."

"I want to do that. Acceleration."

"No, Yui," Raoul answered, gently. "You don't need to go through that."

"But...please, Master. I want to."

The Blondie paused for a moment, studying him. "Are you sure?"

Yui nodded. "I don't want to wait six weeks."

Now Raoul turned to Heiku. "What if he can't tolerate the treatments? Does he have to continue anyway?"

"No," Heiku answered. "We can stop the acceleration any time. He'll benefit from whatever treatments he has, so the length of his recovery depends on how many sessions he completes."

"Then...we'll do that. Acceleration."

Heiku nodded, smiling at Yui. "You're a brave boy. So. Would you like to see what your master has picked out for you?"

Yui considered this for a moment, then shook his head. The thought of seeing his future member, lying on some tray or ice chest was too disturbing. "No, thank you," he answered, his voice trembling. "I'll wait until it's on."

The Blondies both laughed at this.

"Then, you'll come with me now, Yui," Heiku said.

Now Yui turned to his master. "Will you be there when I wake up?"

"Of course," Raoul answered.

Then Yui suddenly hugged Raoul, his face pressed against the Blondie's chest, before following Heiku. Raoul watched him go, smiling.

"Fuck!" Katze shouted, closing his phone with an angry flip.

"You're rather noisy over there," Raoul commented. "Is there a problem?"

"Yes. There's a problem all right. Riki's run off somewhere."

Raoul was a bit surprised at this, now realizing that he'd noticed the mongrel when they'd first arrived, but hadn't seen him in some time. Although, this was hardly surprising, as he'd been careful to avoid even looking over at him, the incident at the Taming Tower still too fresh in his mind, and his punishment at Iason's hands in front of the mongrel mortifying.

"Have you alerted Iason?"

"I just spoke with him. He's....not pleased."

Smiling at Katze's understatement, Raoul sat back down in the waiting room, crossing his legs. "I wouldn't worry. His pet ring has a tracer; Iason will find him."

"He's not wearing it."

"He's not wearing...what?"

"His pet ring. He's not wearing it."

Raoul was puzzled at this. Why wouldn't Riki be wearing his ring? "Well...he can't have gone far. Aren't you going to go look for him?"

"Iason's sending his bodyguards. I'll wait for them."

Now Raoul noticed the chains sitting on the chair next to Katze. “You allowed him to remove his chains?”

Katze scowled, refusing to answer.

The Blondie smiled. Katze would be in for some punishment; that much was certain. And Riki, too. He felt completely unconcerned over Riki’s disappearance, certain that the mongrel would be caught. In fact, he was secretly rather pleased, knowing it meant that the pet would be thoroughly punished.

* * *

Xian had fallen asleep, and Juthian used the opportunity to examine his master’s body, marveling over the Blondie’s flawless physique. He had always been especially enamored of his master’s chest and shoulders, and his muscular, powerful arms. But now his eyes moved the full length of his body, pausing when he came to that place which frightened him most.

In his relaxed state, Xian was far less intimidating, yet his immense size still evident. Juthian marveled over him, feeling a bit ashamed for having made such a fuss earlier, but at the same time, still undeniably nervous over what was to come. As he studied the Blondie’s organ, it suddenly moved.

He gasped, then watched, fascinated, as it slowly began to harden, lengthening as it twitched and grew. He knew then that his master was awake, but he continued to watch him, afraid to look him in the eye.

“Do you like looking at me, Juthian?” Xian asked, softly.

“Yes, Master.” Juthian had performed for his master on countless occasions, and now he felt as if the Blondie was performing for him.

Xian reached down to play with his hair, petting him in the way he always did, the boy’s soft tresses inviting his touch. His heart now began beating a bit faster; soon he would be inside his Ju for the first time. He desperately hoped the boy would be more

cooperative this time, for he did not want to take him by force, yet he was so anxious to take him he could hardly bear it.

“Touch me,” he commanded, almost pleaded.

With tentative fingers, Juthian reached out to stroke him, a little hesitant to be encouraging his master’s arousal, knowing what was coming.

“Like this,” Xian whispered, taking hold of his hand and showing him how he wanted to be fondled. “You’re trembling,” he said, after a pause.

Juthian now braved a look at his master, his eyes betraying his fear.

“Why are you so frightened of me, Ju? This isn’t your first time. I’ve watched you copulate with several pets.”

Juthian shook his head. “Pets aren’t the same. They’re...small. Not like you.”

Xian sat up a bit, leaning back on his elbows. He was now fully erect and anxious to proceed. “I’ll go slowly,” he promised. “Now. Come here.”

He held out his hand to Juthian and pulled him close, his hands once again exploring the boy’s length. Now excited, Xian spread him with both hands, squeezing his buttocks with eager fingers.

“Oh, Ju,” he moaned. “I’m so ready for you.”

Juthian shivered as his master began kissing his neck. “That feels...nice,” he gasped.

“Does it?” Now Xian had rolled him over onto his back, and began running his hand down his body.

Desperately wishing he was still physically capable of truly appreciating the Blondie’s touch, Juthian closed his eyes, trying to imagine what it would feel like if he were still sexually intact. Although he enjoyed his master’s touch and his kisses, it simply didn’t have the same effect on him as it would have, and he found himself almost envious of his master’s pleasure.

“What is it, Ju?”

Juthian shook his head.

“Do you not enjoy being with me?”

“It’s not that. Of course I’m enjoying it. I only wish....”

“Yes? What is it you wish?” Xian flicked the boy’s nipple with his finger, smiling.

“Just that I was still...a pet. That I could still perform.”

Now Xian seemed to grow serious, nodding. “It should have been that way. I was...hasty, Ju. If I had it to do again...I would not have had you modified.”

This confession was enough for Juthian; he knew how difficult it was for his master to admit his own errors. Smiling, he took the Blondie’s hand, and began sucking on his fingers erotically.

“Yes, my pretty boy,” Xian whispered, excited. “That’s very good.”

After a few minutes of this, the Blondie pulled his hand away, dipping his fingers in the bowl of oil. “Spread your legs for me, Ju.”

Juthian obeyed, and for some minutes the Blondie began preparing him with his fingers, trying his best to remain patient. Once the boy had relaxed a bit, he could wait no longer.

“It’s time, Juthian,” he whispered. “Will you be a good boy for me this time?”

Hesitating, Juthian nodded, his heart beating so hard he could hear it in his ears.

Xian took hold of his legs, flipping him onto his stomach as he once again got up on his knees. For some reason, the Blondie was bent on taking the boy in this position, where he could have a good view of his penetration, and where he could control Juthian’s movements by holding his hips. Although he longed to sink into his now quite vulnerably positioned pet, he forced himself to spend a few moments preparing Juthian again, suspecting that he had tensed up as the critical moment drew near.

“I’ve been waiting for this...for a long time,” Xian confessed.

Juthian smiled at this. “How long, Master?”

“Since you first came to me. Almost immediately. I’m afraid I made you perform quite a bit.”

“I didn’t mind. I enjoyed it, Master.”

Holding his legs apart, Xian now pressed himself up to Juthian's entrance, swallowing as he struggled to rein in an overpowering desire to thrust. "Try to stay relaxed, Ju. This will hurt a bit." With that, the Blondie penetrated firmly, but only partially, so that only the tip of his head was in.

Juthian cried out, panicking. "It hurts too much! Let me go!"

Xian, who now had absolutely no intention of letting his pet back out again, answered this by gripping his hips a bit tighter. "Shhh," he soothed. "Just relax."

"I can't relax!"

The Blondie waited as patiently as he could, closing his eyes and gritting his teeth, until Juthian's complaints subsided. Then, he advanced a bit more, once again eliciting a cry of protest.

"No! I hate it!" Juthian screamed, angry.

"Hush," Xian scolded. "What a fuss. And you said you would be good for me."

"But...it hurts so much," Ju whimpered.

From Xian's end of things, it felt quite the opposite; he was dying to give the boy a thorough fucking and now felt a bit annoyed with him. Things were not going as he imagined, and now he was sorely tempted to give up trying to be gentle and just take him as hard as he wanted.

"Ju," he warned, "you're getting a good hard fucking no matter what you do. But if you continue in this vein, you'll get it sooner rather than later, for I won't be inclined to be as patient with you as I've been up until now." The Blondie illustrated his point with some gentle hip movements, ending suddenly in a painful, forceful thrust that took him far deeper than the boy expected.

Juthian whimpered and wiggled a bit, but fell silent, trying to hold his tongue.

"That's it," Xian encouraged. "Submit to me."

Slowly, the Blondie advanced further, a little bit at a time, until Juthian gripped him fully.

"I'm completely inside you now," he whispered, excited.

Finally able to relax a bit, Juthian sighed. This was what he had wanted, after all, although he hadn't been very welcoming to his master when it came right down to it. But now that he could feel the Blondie deep within, he found that he rather liked the sensation, and also the knowledge that they had now crossed a forbidden line and become intimate, just as he had long dreamed.

Once Xian was confident that Juthian could take it, he proceeded with an aggressive acquisition, pulling his hips back onto his cock forcefully, almost violently, and thrusting as deeply and as hard as he could.

"Magnificent," he breathed, eyes rolling back in ecstasy. "Ju...you're absolute heaven." He rocked his body into the boy without restraint, groaning and gasping his delight.

Juthian's body was now completely limp as he allowed his master to do with him whatever he would. Pleased that he was giving the Blondie so much pleasure, he smiled, enjoying the Blondie's exclamations and groans, especially when his master called him "pet."

"You're still gripping me....beautifully, pretty pet! Oh....good boy! Ah! Ju--"

With that, the great Blondie climaxed in Juthian for the first time, his sex cry giving the boy chills as he listened, fascinated, desperately wishing he could see his master's face.

Xian felt as though he were transported to some other realm. As his senses returned to him, he slowly withdrew, then lay down on the bed, pulling Juthian close. "My pet," he whispered, closing his eyes. "That was just as I hoped."

"I'm sorry I was so difficult."

"No; no apologies, Ju. You were very good. I rushed you, I know. In fact, I should be apologizing for taking you when you did not want it. But I found I could not help myself, once I was inside you."

"No apologies," Juthian replied, smiling.

"I wish you could have felt the same pleasure that I did."

Juthian wished for that as well, but remained silent on that point. He was just about to ask his Master if he had heard of G-wave devices when there came a sudden pounding at the front door.

Xian cursed, eliciting another giggle from Juthian, who found it extraordinarily funny to hear his master, a refined Blondie, swearing like a mongrel.

“Stay here,” Xian commanded, rising and donning a pair of silky pajama bottoms. He made his way to the door, angry in advance at whoever had interrupted them. It was no doubt some nosey neighbor come to see what they were up to. But when he opened the door, he was surprised to see Yousi standing there, shivering a bit from the cold.

“Yousi. What...are you doing here?”

Yousi stared back at him, silent.

“What is it? Here...come inside. It’s freezing out there.” Xian opened the door wide, encouraging the Blondie to enter.

Yousi stepped inside, looking around with an inexplicable expression on his face. “I don’t know why I came here,” he said, finally.

“Are you ill, old friend? You don’t...look well.” Now Xian was concerned, having never seen Yousi behave so strangely before.

Yousi looked as though he would speak again, and then suddenly stopped.

“Would you like a drink? Or some tea, perhaps, to warm you up?”

The Blondie stared back at him as if not really hearing or understanding the question, but followed Xian when he led him, by the elbow, to a chair by the fire.

“Juthian!” Xian called.

Juthian emerged from the bedroom in a few moments, after hastily dressing. “Yes, Master?”

“Please make Sir Yousi some tea.”

Juthian continued to stand, staring at Yousi, and wondering what was wrong with him.

“Did you hear me, Ju?” Xian snapped.

“Oh! Yes, Master. Right away.”

As Juthian rushed off into the kitchen, Xian crouched down next to the Blondie, who was now looking around the room, his brow furrowed together as if deeply confused by something.

“Shall I call your Furniture for you?”

Now Yousi looked directly at him, his eyes dark and intense. “This...is my villa,” he said, finally.

A bit taken aback by this, Xian thought for a moment, and suddenly realized, with a bit of excitement, that it had in fact been Yousi’s villa, before Jupiter had stripped him of his assets.

“That’s right. This used to be your villa, Yousi. But I bought it after...after--”

“After Jupiter modified me,” Yousi finished.

Surprised that Yousi was even aware of what had happened, Xian fell silent.

“Now it is your villa,” Yousi said, sadly.

“Well now...there are plenty of villas on the lake. I can buy another one, if you want this one back, Yousi.”

“You...you would sell it back to me?” the Blondie’s eyes shone as he regarded Xian.

Xian smiled. “Better than that. I’ll give it to you, old friend. Would that make you happy?”

“Yes,” Yousi nodded, staring down at his hands. “I think...it would help me.”

Xian studied him for a long moment. Something about Yousi was decidedly different. It almost seemed as if...the Blondie was a bit less impaired. And he seemed to have retrieved part of his memory. He puzzled over this; surely...he was mistaken. Neurological modifications were permanent...weren’t they?

Xian put his hand on the Blondie’s knee in a comforting way, and Yousi suddenly, put his hand on top of his, looking once again into his eyes. “We were friends,” he whispered.

“Yes,” Xian replied, his heart beating a little faster. “We were good friends. You had many friends, Yousi.”

“Omaki...Omaki was my best friend.”

“That’s right. And he’s still your friend. We’re all still your friends, Yousi.”

“He comes to see me every week. And he...takes care of things.”

Xian nodded. He knew that Omaki had taken a personal interest in helping the Blondie recover financially from the confiscation of his assets and had actually given him the pavilion bondage shop, which had allowed Yousi to accumulate a tremendous amount of new wealth.

“I...want to see him,” Yousi continued. “Can I see him, please?”

“Of course. I’ll call him, right away.”

“Your tea, Sir Yousi,” Juthian announced, bringing a tray of tea and almond biscuits.

Yousi smiled, taking the proffered tea and dipping a biscuit into it. “I like tea,” he replied. “I always liked tea.”

“That’s right. You always did like tea. Now...just sit back and enjoy it, and I’ll call Omaki.”

Xian retired to his bedroom where he could talk privately, his hands trembling a bit as he made the call.

“Omaki Ghan.” Only two words, but the Blondie said them in such a way as to sound almost seductive.

“It’s Xian Sami. Omaki...guess who’s come to see me?”

Omaki paused for a moment. “I haven’t the slightest notion. But I must say...I believe this is the first time you’ve called me in ten years. And not even a ‘how are you?’”

“Yes, yes. Forgive me. Listen. It’s Yousi. He came over here, seeming a bit confused. He seems to remember this is his villa.”

“Is he all right?” Omaki asked, concerned.

“Honestly, he seemed a little...upset. And he’s asking for you. He wants to see you.”

“You’re at the villa?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll be there in half an hour.”

“Thank you. And...Omaki...he’s remembering things.”

“What sort of things?”

“He knows that Jupiter modified him in some way. And he remembers that we were all friends. He spoke especially of you.”

Omaki fell silent, puzzling over this information. “He...remembers?”

“Yes. In fact...he seems different. You’ll see what I mean when you get here.”

“Then, I’m on my way.”

Xian returned to the great hall to find Juthian sitting at Yousi’s feet, listening to the great Blondie describe how the room had changed since he occupied it.

“There was a hutch, over there. With blue dishes. They were blue with a white design, like snow on a lake. And...this tea set. I had one like it, only mine had silver trim. I remember the silver because I was the only one who had it. Aristian silver. Everyone else had gold trim. But mine was silver. Silver, not gold.”

Juthian turned to look at his master as he approached, his eyes wide. He knew something was different with Yousi, as well, having spoken to him at the pavilion on many occasions. The Blondie who sat before him was almost like...a different person.

“They were silver,” Yousi repeated, thoughtfully.

“Omaki’s coming to see you, Yousi. He’ll be here soon.”

Yousi smiled at this, helping himself to another cookie. He now fell silent, seeming a bit tired.

Although Xian was anxious to get Juthian back into his bed for another round of sex, he found that he was rather moved by Yousi’s visit. He sat with the Blondie, studying him, wondering about the change in his old friend. Wondering if it were possible that the Yousi he once knew might still be there, somewhere--not dead, but only sleeping, and now, by some miracle, awakening once again.

* * *

“No luck,” Katze reported, after the first hour of searching for Riki had failed to uncover the mongrel. “But several shopkeepers remembered him. They said he’d bought food and drinks, and one

reported that he bought several packs of Dark Baccalias.” Katze decided not to mention the fact they’d also claimed Riki was rude and disrespectful, not wanting to give Iason any more cause to be upset.

Iason sighed. “Very well. I’ll issue an alert. I’ll put a reward out. I want him found before nightfall.”

“Urus, too?”

“Yes.”

“What do you want us to do?”

“Keep searching. But I’ll leave it up to you where you want to look.” Iason ended the call then, rather abruptly.

Katze closed his phone.

“What did he say?” Odi asked.

“He’s putting out an alert.”

“Good. That’s probably the only way we can find him.”

“He wants us to keep searching, though. I think I should go to Ceres. It’s not likely he went back there after what happened with Bison, but you never know. That’s the place he knows best. But I need my car.”

“We can drop you off back at the tower,” Askel offered. “Then I suppose Freyn and I will keep searching Tanagura.”

Odi nodded. “Tai and I will go to Midas. We’ll start in Neal Darts.”

Freyn shook his head. “Did he say why Riki wasn’t wearing his pet ring?”

“No. I think he took it off when he went back to Midas. He must have never put it back on, although I find that a bit odd,” Katze answered.

“And now Iason’s at the penthouse with no security whatsoever,” Odi remarked, worried. “How do we know this isn’t all some ploy to get Iason alone?”

“I think I agree with Iason, though,” Katze answered. “I mean...Riki bought a bike, plus things he’d need if he was planning on hiding out somewhere. I think it’s clear he ran away. And really, it’s not too surprising. I’ve taken him for granted, but Riki was

never one who you'd imagine being a Blondie's pet. He's come a long way in two years, but he's still not adjusted to losing his freedom. I think maybe coming back after having a week to do as he pleased in Midas to a Blondie's rules and restrictions--it was just too much."

The others nodded in agreement.

At that moment, a siren could be heard on the streets, and the information posts on every corner lit up with an alert. A holographic projection of Riki rotated as a voice repeated the contents of the alert: "Alert. Runaway Pet. Z107M, male, Riki. Property of Iason Mink. Also known as Riki the Dark. May be riding a 6500 Supernova. Last seen wearing dark pants and a dark leather jacket. Pet is wearing a gold collar with the initials I.M. Reward for his safe return is set at one million credits."

"One million credits!" Askel cried.

"Holy shit," Katze breathed, shaking his head.

"That should get him back," Odi commented. "Iason's smart."

"And bloody wealthy," Freyn added.

Already people were standing around the alerts, excited. The sirens had shut off and would only come on periodically, but the flashing light continued to spin and the message would repeat every fifteen minutes.

"He must really love his pet," Tai remarked, thoughtfully. "To put that much on his safe return."

Katze nodded. "He does. It may not seem that way as often as he punishes him, but if anything ever happened to him, he'd be devastated."

"Then, let's get moving," Odi replied.

"I want to run in and see Daryl first," Katze answered. "I know he's not awake yet but I still want to see him."

Freyn nodded. "Then we'll come back in about twenty minutes to pick you up and take you back to your car."

"Thanks." Katze smiled, dashing back inside the hospital.

Kei had just finished with a delivery in Mistral Park when he heard the alert sirens. He brought his car to a halt in front of one of the information centers, staring at Riki's image and listening to the alert in disbelief.

"What do we have here?" he murmured, a smile curling his lips. So. Riki had run away from his master...and it sounded as though the great Blondie wanted him back.

Kei was furious with Riki for what he'd done to Guy and the rest of Bison and had been wondering how he could get back at the mongrel.

Now, he saw his chance. He felt as though his prayers had been answered. And...one million credits? He'd be set for life. And if he could get his hands on Riki, he'd give him a good working over before he returned him to his master. He'd get the reward and his payback.

It was all too perfect.

Grinning, he sped off, trying to guess where the mongrel was hiding. Now that an alert had been issued, he knew Riki would have to stay put, wherever he was. The question was...where had he gone?

He felt certain Riki would not dare return to Ceres, not after what he'd done to Bison. And he probably had been in a hurry to get out of Tanagura. Although it was possible he'd gone to Midas, somehow Kei suspected he'd try to get as far away from his master as possible. If he hadn't already left the planet, he'd probably made for Urus.

He got on the Midas freeway, heading toward Urus, and was just about to move into airspace when he passed the closed road that led to Dana Burn. He practically skidded to a halt. Of course. It would be the perfect hideout. No one would think to look there. The place was cursed...at least that's what was said. Perhaps even haunted. Not that Kei believed any of it.

Smiling, he made a U-turn and took the old road to the ruins, just as the sun began to set. By the time Dana Burn was in sight, it was dark, and snow had started to fall.

Parking his car a bit away from the structure, he crept toward it, shivering a bit. The old place was creepy, that much was true. As he neared it, he saw a bike parked outside the entrance. Smiling, he moved closer and made the identification: a 6500 Supernova, obviously brand new.

“I’ve got you now, bastard,” he whispered.

Flipping open his laser-knife, he crept toward the dark entrance, peering inside. It was pitch black, but for a bluish-green light coming from a ways within. He could hear...a strange buzzing. Was it a radio? Slowly, quietly, he crept toward the light; coming to an open door, he peered into the room.

Riki was sitting on a bed, smoking, fiddling with a radio that seemed to play nothing but static.

“Hello, Riki,” he said, softly.

Riki startled, jumping to his feet and dropping his smoke.

Kei laughed. “You were so fucking easy to find. You’ve got no imagination, pet. And now, thanks to your stupidity, I’ve just earned myself one million credits.”

“Fuck you,” Riki replied.

“No...you’re the one who’s fucked. After I’m finished with you, you’ll wish you’d never been born. I might even have to cut up that pretty face of yours.” Kei began walking toward him, holding his knife in a threatening manner.

“Stop right there, you bloody bastard,” the mongrel commanded.

Laughing, Kei lunged for him, surprised when Riki suddenly pointed a laser gun at him and fired.

It all happened in a blink of an eye.

The laser went through the center of his chest, exiting out his back. Kei fell to his knees, stunned.

Now Riki stared at him, horrified. “I told you to stop,” he said, rather weakly.

Kei fell back to the ground, unable to move. The pain was unimaginable. He gazed up at the mongrel, frightened. "Help me," he gasped.

Riki knelt down next to him, panicked.

"Shit," he murmured, pressing his hands on Kei's chest to try and stop the bleeding. Suddenly, Kei looked like a little boy, his eyes wide, his mouth trembling.

"Hold...hold my hand," Kei begged, fully aware that he was about to die, and now very much afraid. His vendetta against the mongrel now forgotten, Kei only wanted someone to be with him as the darkness of his final moment overcame him. He was in too much pain to say anything more, though he wanted to give Riki a message for Guy--to tell him that he loved him. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

Riki held his hand as requested, and for a long moment they gazed at one another. Then, slowly, the light in Kei's eyes seemed to fade away, and the life slipped away from his body, as Riki watched in utter horror.

Kei was dead.

Still holding Kei's hand, Riki now let go, staring down at his hands, which were covered in the boy's blood.

"Fuck," he whispered, as tears formed in his eyes. "Oh fuck."

For some moments, the mongrel wept over Kei's body, devastated at what he'd just done.

* * *

Yousi looked up, and, seeing Omaki approaching him, smiled. "Omaki."

"How are you, old friend? I heard you wanted to see me?"

"This is my villa," he replied.

"Well now...it's true that this once was your villa. But now it belongs to Xian."

Xian shook his head. "Actually...I gave it back to him."

Omaki studied the Blondie for a moment. "You...gave it to him?"

"He seemed...upset."

"It's my villa," Yousi repeated.

"Yes, Yousi, it appears so. That was very nice of Xian, wasn't it, to give it back to you like that?"

Yousi nodded. "We're all still friends."

Now Omaki took in Xian's half-dressed state, and Juthian's hastily assembled attire, and smiled. "Then, perhaps we ought to let Xian have his last night here in the villa. How about you come and stay with me tonight?"

"All right," Yousi replied, agreeably.

Omaki turned to Xian. "Let me pay you for the villa."

"No, no. It's the least I can do. You've already done so much for him."

"I insist."

Xian shook his head. "No."

"How about half, then? Let me pay you for half its value. We'll think of it as...a partnership in helping an old friend. Please. If I had known he even remembered having a villa or that he wanted one, I would have taken care of it. Please, Xian."

Pausing for a moment, Xian nodded. "Very well."

"Come, Yousi. I daresay you've had enough biscuits and tea. You'll eat all his cookies and then what will poor Xian have with his tea? Let's go now, and give him some privacy."

"I had eleven biscuits," Yousi announced. "And two cups of tea. But these ones don't have silver trim." He held up a teacup, examining it.

"I'll bring him back tomorrow to pick up his vehicle," Omaki added. "Are you planning to purchase another villa?"

"Most likely. I was thinking of something a little more...isolated."

Omaki glanced at Juthian and smiled. "Yes. I must say, my arrival seemed to generate a good deal of interest at Megala's villa. I could actually see the curtains moving."

Xian laughed. "Yes, of all my neighbors, Megala is the nosiest. In fact, I'm rather surprised he hasn't dreamed up some excuse to come over here. Last time I was here, he kept coming over to borrow sugar. I finally asked him what it was for and he claimed he was making a cake."

Both Blondies laughed at this.

"Making a cake!" Yousi repeated, smiling.

"You'd like that, wouldn't you, Yousi? How about I have Ru make you a cake tonight?"

"How many pieces can I have?" he asked, looking concerned.

"You may have as much as you like. Though if you eat more than two pieces, your tummy will hurt."

"What kind of cake?"

"What kind would you like?"

"I don't know."

"Well...if I recall, your favorite cake is--"

"Aristian chocolate!" Yousi yelled, standing up. His teacup and saucer went crashing to the floor. "My favorite cake is Aristian chocolate!"

Juthian rushed to clean up the mess, as Omaki tried to calm the Blondie down. "Yes...that's right. Aristian chocolate."

"I just remembered!"

Xian and Omaki exchanged a look, curious.

"All right. Maybe two cups of tea is a bit too much," Omaki said, gently. "Come, Yousi, let's go now, shall we?"

Yousi nodded, suddenly looking very tired.

"Thanks, Omaki," Xian whispered.

Omaki smiled, glancing over at Juthian with a wink. "Good luck tonight."

Xian, startled that the Blondie had already guessed their intentions, had no reply to this, but nodded ever so slightly.

As the Blondies began heading toward the door, Yousi suddenly stopped, and turned to Xian.

"Thank you for your kindness, Xian," he said.

And in that moment, the way the Blondie spoke the words, and a sudden flash of intelligence in his usually vacant eyes, it almost seemed as if the old Yousi had returned to them.

He shivered.

* * *

For a long time, Riki simply sat near Kei's body, staring at him. Finally he decided he had to do something. There was no way he was spending the night alone with a corpse. He wiped his hands off on Kei's jacket, then checked his pockets for anything useful. He found an independent channel handheld, and put that aside; he also took Kei's knife.

Around his neck he discovered a pendant charm; when he turned it over, he saw that it read Love, Guy. He removed this and shoved it into his pocket, feeling a bit sick as he contemplated how Guy would react upon discovering that Kei was dead. His anger at Guy was now completely dissipated; now he felt sorry for his old pairing partner, and not a little guilty as well.

He left Kei with his paper credits, believing the old superstition that money from a dead man only brought bad luck. Then, he took hold of his body and dragged him outside and down to the ocean.

It had been snowing a bit, and Kei's body left a trail of blood in the snow, all the way down to the beach. Riki rolled him into the water, and Kei simply lay there on the sands, the tides washing over him.

"Fuck," he muttered. He picked up the body and took it deeper into the water until he was satisfied the sea would take him away.

As he emerged from the water, he realized how foolish it had been to get wet. He had no other clothes, and now he was freezing. Shivering, he hurried back to the shelter, immediately undressing and sitting close to the heater as he tried to warm himself again. The heater was helpful, but not very powerful, and Riki began to long for a fire.

Once he was sufficiently warm, he took Kei's laser knife and cut up an old wooden chair, then took the pieces out to the shelter entryway, deciding to build a fire just inside the building where smoke could escape. This was accomplished rather quickly, for the wood was very dry. Riki retrieved his radio and tried to position it closer to the entrance, suspecting that some sort of shield in the building was blocking the signal.

Sure enough, he immediately began receiving transmissions, and his heart almost stopped when he heard his name. He listened to the broadcasted alert in disbelief, his eyes widening when he heard the reward Iason was offering for his return. One million credits? No wonder Kei had come for him.

Suddenly, Riki just wanted to go home. And he knew that home was with Iason, in Eos. He was tired, depressed, and uncomfortable. He wasn't even completely sure now why he'd run, except that he had been having a very bad day. He'd put Katze in a bind; Katze would probably never forgive him for it. And now Riki seriously doubted he would be able to hide out for long. With all of Amoi on alert for him, he'd be caught the first time he ventured into one of the cities.

Worst of all, he'd done the unthinkable. He'd actually killed someone. Though he had no great love for Kei, now he could not get the mongrel's face out of his mind, his wide eyes, his trembling lips, the way he begged Riki to hold his hand as he died.

He was also a bit frightened, ashamed as he was to admit it; he kept hearing sounds coming from deep within the old structure that he found especially unnerving, and in the back of his mind he half expected Kei's corpse, dripping with seawater, to come walking back into the shelter, arms outstretched, seeking vengeance for his untimely death.

Though he wanted to go back to Eos, he knew Iason would be furious with him; he dreaded the thought of how the Blondie would punish him for running away.

Perhaps...if Riki could talk to his master, he could negotiate some sort of punishment-free return. He knew it was highly unlikely Iason would agree, but it was worth a shot.

Retrieving Kei's phone, the mongrel sat near the fire and with a pounding heart dialed Iason's connection.

"Iason Mink," came an anxious greeting, immediately after the first ring.

"It's me," he replied.

"Riki," Iason exclaimed, the relief in his voice betraying his worry. "Where are you, pet?"

"Somewhere safe."

"Pet, tell me where you are!" Iason commanded, suddenly furious.

"Stop yelling at me or I'll hang up," the mongrel threatened.

"I want you home, Riki. Now." The Blondie's voice was calmer, but firm.

"Not so fast. I have a few conditions."

A short pause. "What, Riki? What is it you want?" Impatient, the Blondie was unable to wait for his response. "The bike? Is that what this is all about?"

Surprised, Riki thought about this for a moment. "Yeah, a bike would be nice. I'd like to keep this one, anyway."

"Very well. I will let you keep the bike, provided you return home immediately. No...tell me where you are, and I'll come and get you."

"That's not all I want. I also want a promise from you that I won't be punished for running away."

Exasperated, the Blondie sighed. "Riki. You know perfectly well you'll be punished. But I can promise you that your punishment will be much less severe if you come home now than if I have to find you and bring you home."

The mongrel fell silent at this, considering.

"Riki," Iason continued, his voice breaking. "I've been so worried about you. Why...why did you run away?"

"Because I could."

“Are you so unhappy, pet?”

“Sometimes. You’re always disciplining me for one thing or another.”

“I discipline you because you persist in disobeying me.”

“Like this three strikes rule, for instance,” Riki continued, ignoring him. “It’s absurd that I have to say Master this and Master that all the time. I can’t remember to do it, and then you beat with that bloody taming stick.”

Iason listened quietly as his pet poured out his heart, explaining all that had been eating away at him.

“And...this thing where you ration out my smokes makes me feel so...helpless and worthless. I don’t want to be completely dependent on you for every little thing. You’ve got to let me keep my pride.”

“We can discuss all these issues when you return,” the Blondie promised. He had been desperately trying to pull up a location on his pet’s signal and was frustrated when he was unable to do so.

“I’m on an Independent channel,” Riki said, guessing at what his master was up to by the sound of the typing in the background. “You can’t trace me.”

Iason closed his eyes, sighing. “Riki. Please. Tell me where you are.”

“Not until you agree to my conditions.”

“Pet,” the Blondie replied, his anger now creeping into his voice, “you will tell me where you are, and you will tell me NOW. It’s only a matter of time before I find you. But if you don’t tell me where you are and I have to find you on my own, Riki, you are going to regret it. You complain about being punished--just wait until I get you under my arm then.”

Now Riki fell silent, worried.

“Did you hear me, Riki?”

The mongrel’s gaze drifted past the fire to the snow outside, where his attention was captured by the snow reddened from Kei’s blood. Suddenly, the events of the day came crashing down, the look in Kei’s eyes as he died, clutching his hand, and how Riki had

dragged his body down to the sea and dumped in there. He found that he was weeping.

Iason, surprised to hear his pet crying, immediately softened. “What is it, Riki?”

“I...can’t tell you.”

Now the Blondie was concerned, wondering what his pet was hiding. “Riki...please...let me come get you. You don’t...sound well.”

“Good night, Iason.”

“Riki! Don’t hang up!”

But the mongrel ended the call, leaving Iason holding the receiver.

“Riki,” he whispered.

Shaking, he hung the phone up, staring at it for a few moments. Once again, he felt a burning in his eyes, as tears of worry and love welled up there, clouding his vision. He sat alone in the dark for some time, puzzling over his pet’s words, and as he did so, he felt another headache coming on.

This time, he welcomed it, remembering how he had been able to find Riki at the Taming Tower after such a headache. He closed his eyes, concentrating all his thoughts on where his pet was. Now, he was able to rise above the pain, remaining focused on his purpose; and when an image began to form in his mind, he honed in, hovering there as long as he could.

His pet was afraid; he sat huddled close to a blue light, startling with the slightest noise. And...he was naked. He was in a dark room, lit by low lights along ancient walls. Iason moved closer, penetrating deeper into his mind, searching for the answer. And then, clear as the day, the place name came to him: Dana Burn.

Immediately opening his eyes, the Blondie ignored his still pounding headache and went to a cabinet, retrieving a C1 kasey whip. It was brutal, with no protective buffering mechanism, which meant he would probably break the skin. But he knew he had to address his pet’s actions with a firm hand to discourage Riki from ever running away again. He slid a can of Accelerator into his

pocket and then left the penthouse, making for the old ruins at Dana Burn.

As he moved onto the freeway, his headache began to dissipate, and the Blondie's anger began to rise. His pet's actions were highly embarrassing; pets simply did not run away, and now all of Amoi knew that the pet of head of the Syndicate had done the unthinkable. It reflected poorly on his abilities as a master, and on his entire household, too, and Iason had no doubt that Jupiter would have something to say about it. Not only this, Riki's timing could not have been worse. An entire day had been wasting searching for his pet, a day that should have been spent preparing for the trade convention and for Commander Khosi's visit to Amoi.

By the time the Blondie arrived at the shelter ruins, he had worked himself up into a fury. He pulled his vehicle up to the entrance, not even trying to hide his approach. There was no escape for his pet now. He noted the bike with a nod; this confirmed his vision, and he had no doubt that Riki was somewhere within.

He got out of his car, kasey-whip in hand, and entered the dwelling, stepping past a low-burning fire. It took but moments to find his pet; he simply followed the light, for Riki had left the doors open out of fear of being trapped inside the building.

Riki was asleep, lying naked on the floor by a portable heater. Iason blinked, his joy at finding his pet alive and well for a moment overpowering his anger. He longed to run to him, lift him up and hold him close; but he knew that he had a responsibility to perform first. His pet needed to be disciplined.

"Pet," he said, loudly.

Riki startled, opening his eyes. Upon apprehending the Blondie, he gasped in alarm, jumping to his feet.

"How...how did you," he began, then fell silent, his eyes locked on the kasey-whip.

"Riki, I have never been so angry with you as I am at this moment," he said, his voice shaking. "I warned you what would happen if I had to come and fetch you." The Blondie began slowly

walking toward the mongrel, who backed away in fear, his path suddenly blocked by a table behind him.

“Iason--”

“Turn around, Riki, and bend over that table. You’ll take 50 strikes for your disobedience, no negotiations.”

The mongrel, having never seen his master quite so angry--or at least, not in a long while--quickly realized the futility of arguing with him. He was going to be punished; Riki knew there was no way he could get out of it, much as he desperately wished for it.

“Now, Riki!” Iason yelled.

The pet looked at the whip, noting immediately that he had never been punished with it before. It was very thin, which Riki knew meant sharp, slicing strikes, and he began to tremble as he contemplated what was coming. But he obeyed Iason and bent over the table as instructed.

Iason took a step forward and then to the side of his pet, and with a mighty swing brought the kasey whip down on his pet’s backside, eliciting a gasp from the frightened mongrel. Then came a second strike, and then a third, a fourth, and a fifth. One strike immediately after another, on and on, in what seemed to Riki to be an interminable series of agonizing strikes. He wept and cried out, but Iason was unrelenting, delivering every one of the 50 promised strikes on his pet’s tender flesh, cutting into his skin with excruciating force.

The Blondie scolded his pet all the while, becoming increasingly agitated as the sum total of his worries and anger that day were funneled into his punishment. Riki suffered more than he had ever suffered at the hand of his master before; but as he lay, receiving strike after punishing strike, he achieved a sort of inner healing, telling himself that he was being punished, also, for taking Kei’s life, and that he deserved every lash, in compensation for his terrible deed.

When at last the fifty strikes were achieved, Iason stopped, placing the whip on the table. Riki continued to sob, almost oblivious to the fact that the punishment had actually ceased. He

felt Iason's gloved hand press into his back, and then before he had a chance to resist, he felt the almost incomprehensible pain of Accelerator burning into his flesh.

He cried out, blacking out for a moment, then returning to his senses only to be so overcome with pain that he fell silent, shaking.

"I am sorry, pet. But without Accelerator, you would certainly have scars," Iason said, his voice now soothing.

"Is my punishment finished?"

"Yes, pet."

"I want to go home," Riki sniffed.

Iason smiled at this, pleased that Riki thought of the penthouse as his home. "We're going. Turn around, pet."

As Riki turned, he saw that Iason had removed his glove and was holding Riki's pet ring between his middle fingers. "This is never coming off again, Riki," he said, firmly.

The mongrel made no reply, allowing his master to place the ring back on him as he stood, hanging his head.

"I trusted you, Riki. And you betrayed that trust. I'm very disappointed in you."

"I know," Riki replied, weakly.

Iason then helped his pet get dressed, almost as an adult does a child.

"Why did you take off your clothes?" he asked, puzzled.

But Riki remained silent, sighing.

The Blondie found Riki's laser gun, knife, and handheld, pocketing them all, but ignored the heater and radio. He retrieved his whip; then, guiding Riki by the elbow, led him out to the vehicle. As they passed Riki's bike, the mongrel looked longingly at it, slowing his pace, though he said nothing.

Iason noticed his gaze and smiled. "You want the bike, is that it, pet?" he asked, softly.

Hesitantly, Riki nodded.

"Very well. I know I shouldn't, but I'll let you keep the bike, Riki. Get in the car and I'll put it in the back."

Feeling a bit cheered by this, Riki then slid into the vehicle as his master lifted the bike easily, stowing it away in the trunk.

More snow had fallen, now covering Kei's blood, and so the Blondie did not perceive what had happened there, nor did he notice the vehicle parked some distance away, for it was dark, and all his thoughts were bent on his pet.

Relieved to finally have Riki back, and having thoroughly punished his pet for his transgression, Iason now felt much calmer, though he continued to scold his pet a bit during the drive.

Riki remained silent. He realized now that Iason had not been completely honest when he'd said his punishment was over, not if he was going to be subjected to his lectures all the way home. He shivered, suddenly feeling cold, and...a bit ill.

He found his thoughts drifting, and he let his head fall back against the back of his seat, closing his eyes.

The next thing he knew, he was being gently shaken awake by Iason, who smiled at him. "We're home. You fell asleep."

Riki stared at him for a moment, suddenly feeling too tired to move.

"What is it, Riki? Are you ill?"

"Hmmm." The mongrel felt confused, as though everything were spinning around him.

"Riki?" Iason removed his glove, pressing his hand to his forehead. "You're burning up," he announced, alarmed.

The mongrel tried to reply, but found even this small task too demanding.

Iason rushed around to his side of the vehicle and lifted him up, carrying him inside and up to the penthouse. He was greeted by Katze and the others, who had all returned from their searches, and while everyone was relieved to see the mongrel in Iason's arms, it was soon apparent that Riki was unwell.

"Katze. Get me a medic team."

"What's wrong with him?" Katze asked, as he rushed over to the terminal.

"I'm not sure. He has a fever, that much I'm certain."

“Where did you find him?” Odi asked.

“Dana Burn.”

At this, everyone exchanged looks, surprised. Of all the places Riki might have hid, none of them would have thought to look there. Although they all wanted to know how Iason had found him, it was clear that this was not the moment for questions.

Iason took his pet to his bed, laying him down gently. Riki stirred, his breathing labored, his eyes fluttering open briefly, and then shutting again. He coughed a bit hollowly. The Blondie leaned close and could hear wheezing and strange sounds coming from his chest. He pushed the hair back from Riki’s face, worried.

“It’s all right, my pet,” he whispered, soothingly. “You’re home now. I’ll take care of you.”

And at the moment, far away in the slums of Midas, someone else was worried about the one he loved; Guy paced the flat anxiously, wondering why Kei had not come home. And Riki, drifting on a fitful sleep, that night dreamed a darker dream, tossing erratically like the waves that carried Kei’s body and rocked him in his final slumber.

Iason's Prayer

Iason undressed his pet so that he could move without restrictions, and then sat on the bed next to him, watching him anxiously as he impatiently waited for the medic team to arrive. Riki was now delirious, tossing and mumbling incoherently.

“Is there anything I can do?” Katze asked, concerned for Riki but at the same time desperate to get back to the hospital before Daryl woke up.

“Bring me a washcloth and bowl of cool water, a leukopen shot and the vitalmeter. Oh, and please call off the alert,” Iason answered, and then added a bit angrily, “shouldn’t that team be here by now?”

“It’s only been seven minutes since I called,” Katze replied, softly.

The Blondie sighed, taking Riki’s pulse, worried when he found it to be extraordinarily fast. “What happened to you, pet?” he whispered.

“Iason,” Riki answered, groaning.

“Yes, pet.” Excited, Iason leaned forward. “I’m here. I’m here, love.”

But Riki did not seem to hear him, calling out for him again.

“Oh, Riki.”

Katze set the bowl of water on the table next to the bed, wetting the washcloth for Iason. The Blondie took it and put it across his forehead, and then scanned him with the vitalmeter.

“His heart rate and blood pressure are both elevated,” Iason announced. “And he has a fever. 104.8.”

“Holy shit,” Katze replied. “That’s dangerously high.”

Iason did not reply, too upset to say anything. He gave his pet the leukophen shot, comforting himself that at least his fever would drop. The medication worked quickly, acting to reduce body heat without impeding the activity of the white blood cells that had amassed in his besieged system.

The medic team arrived, rushing into the bedroom to examine the now semi-conscious pet. A quick scan brought up a curious result.

“That’s odd,” one technician said.

“What? What is odd?” Iason demanded, anxious.

“He’s been infected with the erophatenacillus virus. That’s only found in one place. The ocean.”

“You must be mistaken,” Iason replied.

“The scanner doesn’t make mistakes. Has he been in the ocean recently?”

“No,” Iason replied, then fell silent, remembering that Dana Burn was next to the ocean, and that he had found his pet naked inside the old shelter. Had Riki gone into the ocean, and gotten his clothes wet? Was that why he had taken them off? But...why would he do such a thing?

“Well, he’s been exposed to ocean water in some form. And it was cold water. The virus only survives in frigid temperatures, which is why it’s rarely a problem. Most people don’t swim in the ocean in the winter.”

The Blondie puzzled over this, imagining his pet in the cold, uninviting sea. Had he gone in to...catch a fish? Surely not. But Iason could think of no other reason that would compel his pet to go into the ocean in the middle of an Amoian winter.

“His temperature is 103.9. Have you given him anything for it?”

“Yes. A leukophen shot. It was 104.8 a few moments ago.”

The technician nodded. “Good. Those are exactly the right thing to give. You may give him up to 4 in one day, no more. His fever should lower a bit more and will probably stabilize at about

102. Now...assuming you keep his fever down, the real danger is his lungs, which can fill with fluid. He sounds pretty bad right now, but we'll implant a dispenser that will release the medication he needs for that. It will dissolve inside his body once its supply is depleted." Now the technician pointed to Riki's lash marks. "Did you apply Accelerator on those?"

"Yes."

"Ah. That might present a problem."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it will help with the healing of those lash marks, but unfortunately Accelerator can also accelerate the replication of a virus. And his system is trying to fight the sudden invasion. That's why his fever is so high."

Iason, stunned by this information, fell silent again, feeling a bit angry at himself. Had he, however unintentionally, harmed his pet in a serious way?

"They should really put warnings on those cans. They can turn a low-level viral infection into a real problem. I've been complaining about it for nearly--"

"What else can you give him?" Iason interrupted.

"I'm afraid there are no antivirals to combat this particular strain. He'll just have to ride it out. Keep him cool, like you're doing with this washcloth here--you might try wiping down his whole body with a coolant, or even give him a bath. Also try to get him into a sitting position every once and awhile-- hold him if you have to. That will help with his breathing and lessen any coughing. He hasn't started to cough yet, but he will."

"How long will he be like this?"

The technician shrugged. "It's hard to say. Probably a few days, but it could be a week."

Iason sighed. "Then, please come back every day to check him again."

"That's not actually necessary," the technician began.

"I find that is IS necessary," Iason snapped, angrily. "You will come back and examine him every day until this infection is gone."

“Yes, Sir.” With a slight bow, the technician fell silent and proceeded to implant the medication dispenser between Riki’s ribs, into his right lung. Though he numbed the area first, the pet still felt the insertion into his lung, and opened his eyes wide, crying out.

“Iason!”

“Hush, pet,” the Blondie soothed. “It’s all right. Just a stick, and you’ll be feeling better soon.”

Staring wildly at the Blondie as though he did not quite recognize him, Riki reached for his side where the device had been implanted, confused when he could find nothing there. Iason took hold of his hand, bringing it up to his lips for a kiss.

“I’m here, Riki. You’re okay.”

The technician raised his eyebrows at the open display of affection between master and pet but said nothing. It was common knowledge that Iason’s pet had special status in the Mink household, though he had never witnessed a Blondie kissing a pet’s hand before--and a mongrel at that.

“Is this virus thing he has, that eroticaphallica whatever, is it contagious?” Katze asked, watching from the doorway.

“No. Thankfully, it only enters the skin from cold seawater into broken skin. It looks like the pet had been punished before,” the technician said, pointing to older marks, “and he probably had microscopic abrasions that allowed the virus to gain entry. As I said, it’s extremely rare. I’ve never seen an erophatenacillus infection in my entire career.”

Iason was once again rather mortified to discover that Riki’s injuries from previous punishments had led to his infection. It had never occurred to him that punishing his pet could lead to any real harm, other than discomfort. This revelation now caused him to reconsider how he chose to punish his pet. He would have to be careful, he decided, about breaking the skin. Or perhaps he should return to his pet’s hated punishment of wearing chains. Perhaps more spankings, rather than tamings or using other implements...or perhaps he should simply--

“He’s all set. Will there be anything else?”

“No,” Iason replied, dismissing him with a wave of his hand.

“Then, I will return...tomorrow, per your orders, to check on his progress.”

Iason nodded almost imperceptibly, wiping Riki’s forehead with the damp cloth. Riki was holding his hand, gripping him almost painfully. The technicians left without his even noticing; when Katze finally spoke, he was almost startled.

“Iason...I’m sorry to bother you with this but, would it be all right if I returned to the hospital? Daryl may be awake now. And I’ve called off the alert just as you asked.”

“That is fine.”

Katze sighed, relieved. “Thank you,” he replied, breathlessly, as he hurried off to go to the hospital. He was very concerned that Daryl had woken and found that he was not there, when Katze had promised to be there.

As he rushed to leave the penthouse, he was stopped by Tai.

“I’m whipping up a late dinner. Do you want to wait to--”

“I’ll eat when I get back,” Katze interrupted. “I’m going back to the hospital.”

“Aren’t you hungry? We were out searching all day.”

“I want to get over there right away. If he wakes up and I’m not there....”

“Wait, Katze!” Tai cried, rushing back into the kitchen. He returned almost immediately with a basket of warm rolls that he had just prepared, predicting that Katze would want to return to the hospital. “Take these, anyway. I put some butter on them the way you like it, and there’s some raspberry marmalade in there, too. I’ll keep your dinner warm for you.”

“Thanks,” Katze answered, smiling gratefully. He was, in fact, famished, and the rolls smelled heavenly. They were his favorite, and he appreciated the way Tai always seemed to look after his comfort--after everyone’s comfort, for that matter, when it came to food.

As he left, Tai returned to the kitchen, only to be startled when Odi followed him inside, pushing him up against the wall. They had

been together all day, but Odi had been quite focused on finding Riki, never once alluding to their recent sexual encounter. Although Tai had found himself admiring the way Odi took charge of the situation, he was starting to feel a little hurt that the handsome bodyguard had not once even looked at him in a way suggestive of their having a burgeoning relationship.

So when Odi clasped his hands, pinning his arms up against the wall, and began to kiss him, Tai responded eagerly. The bodyguard pressed himself up against his body, and Tai could feel him grow hard, just as his own body responded.

It was a long, rather passionate kiss, ending only when Odi bent down to kiss and bite his neck.

“Come to my bed tonight,” he commanded. “I won’t take no for an answer.”

“But,” Tai began, then gasped as Odi began blowing into his ear.

“Come to my bed,” he repeated. “We don’t have to go any farther than we already have. But I want you in my bed. Sleep with me tonight.”

“Well,” Tai replied, feeling a little less hesitant with Odi’s promise, but still a little unsure, “I need to think about it, Odi.”

“What’s there to think about?” Odi answered, almost angry. “Don’t you trust me?”

“It’s not that...I mean....” Tai fell silent, blushing furiously, blinking as he suddenly felt his eyes stinging with tears upon hearing Odi’s annoyed tone of voice. He was ashamed to be so nervous and hesitant, but he could not help it; he’d never had a relationship with anyone before, and certainly had never slept in the same bed with another man.

Odi, perceiving his distress, softened. “Hey,” he whispered, releasing one of his hands to take his chin in his hand. “I’m sorry. I’m not being very fair to you, am I? How about you just come to my room for a drink, and then you can decide if you feel comfortable sleeping with me. And I only mean sleeping...I know you’re not ready for the next step.”

Tai nodded. “All right.”

Odi smiled. "Good. I'm sorry if I upset you. This day has been...stressful. I wasn't thinking clearly."

"That's okay. I'm sorry that I'm so...so...."

"Hush." Odi put a finger up to his mouth. "You have nothing to be sorry about. I was wrong to push you. It's not my place to order you around. And I think your inexperience is...sweet. It's just that," now he began kissing Tai's neck again, "you get me so excited. I haven't felt this way...in a long time."

Tai, rather than feeling complimented by this remark, instead found himself wondering who Odi referred to, who the bodyguard had been with in the past. Jealousy, a new feeling for the virgin would-be priest, now filled him with feelings of darkness and hurt, and he closed his eyes, trying to fight it.

Odi studied him, his brow furrowing. "What is it? Did I...offend you that much?"

Tai shook his head. "It's not that. I was only wondering...who you meant...when you told me about-- having not felt so good in a long time. I mean, who it was before. That made you feel good."

Now Odi smiled. "Don't tell me you're jealous?"

Tai shrugged, refusing to look at him.

Odi laughed softly, trying to force Tai's attention by moving in front of his line of vision. "Hey. I'm flattered that you'd be jealous. But you don't have anything to be jealous about. Those others...they meant nothing. Just a few good fucks here and there."

Others. Tai disliked the plurality of this confession, pouting as Odi took hold of his chin again.

"Tai," Odi whispered, kissing him again, gently. "Don't be angry with me. Don't be jealous. I know we've only started things, but I already feel more for you than I did for all the others put together."

Feeling a little appeased by this, Tai offered a small smile, looking up at him with wide, innocent eyes.

Now Odi put his fist on his chest. "Shit. When you look at me like that...it almost stops my heart." He traced a finger down his soft cheek. "Beautiful boy."

They kissed for another long moment, until Tai pushed him away. "Now get out. I need to finish dinner. Everyone's starving."

"Yes, Sir," Odi answered, saluting him. Then he winked. "I like this domineering side of you. It's a turn on."

"Out!" Tai replied, hand on one hip, pointing to the door as he tried to suppress a smile.

With a grin, Odi obeyed, and Tai proceeded to put together a dinner as fast as he could. It was late, and none of them--Tai, Odi and the brothers--had eaten since the morning. He was fairly certain Iason had not eaten either, and he knew the Blondie had barely eaten anything the night before or during breakfast.

Fortunately Tai always kept plenty of prepared food around for just such a contingency, such as an unexpected visit from an important guest. It was a habit he'd picked up as a chef in his cousin's palace, where dignitaries arrived at all hours of the night. It was not uncommon for Tai to be woken from a deep sleep and commanded to have a meal on the table in less than a half hour. He'd endured enough punishment at his cousin's hand--who did not seem to acknowledge they were even related--after failing to prepare meals quickly enough to have developed a rather obsessive fear of being unprepared. Accordingly, he typically made extra loaves of fresh bread each day, and a good stew or soup, and perhaps a casserole or shepherd's pie, and he always baked a fresh cake or torte, or prepared some frozen creams.

So it was not long before he had the table set and the steaming dishes laid out, and without even needing to sound the dinner chime, the household gravitated to the table, with the exception of Master Iason and Riki.

"Shit. I'm so hungry I can feel my stomach digesting myself," Askel moaned.

"Idiot. You have to be like...starving for weeks before you digest yourself," Freyn replied. "And your stomach sticks out when that happens."

"You mean like your stomach does?"

"I don't know what you mean," Freyn replied, sucking in his gut. Though he was, in fact, quite fit and trim, there was no question that he'd put on a few pounds since coming to Iason's penthouse. He made a mental note to start going for an evening swim each night and kick up his abdominal routine just to annoy Askel with his rock hard body.

Askel laughed. "Like we can't tell you're holding your stomach in. And what are you smiling about?"

"I'm just thinking about how I'm going to kick your ass when we have a fitness challenge. Let's see who can swim 20 laps the fastest tonight."

"You're on. Only I'm surprised you'd risk the pool, brother. There might be amoebas in there, you know," Askel taunted.

"Well at least I'm smart enough to know you can't digest yourself just from missing one bloody meal."

"Oh yeah? Well," now Askel fell silent, unable to think of a reply.

Freyn laughed hysterically. "You're so lame."

"Fuck you."

"Bloody say that to my face!"

"I just did, but you're too dumb to--"

Now Odi came up behind the brothers and put his hands behind each of their necks, squeezing them both painfully. "I'm in no mood for your ridiculous disputes tonight. So kiss and make up, and then shut the fuck up."

"Ow!" Askel complained. "That hurts, Odi! Let go!"

"Yeah," Freyn agreed. "It does bloody well hurt."

"Are you going to kiss and make up?"

"I don't know about kiss and make up," Freyn protested.

"I'll do it. Let go of my fucking neck and I'll do it."

Odi released the brothers, and Askel stepped forward, leaning up to kiss Freyn on the mouth. Just as Freyn was about to push him away, Askel suddenly kissed him passionately, sticking his tongue into his mouth and moving it about wildly.

“Arggh!” Freyn yelled, pushing him away. “You fucking put your tongue in my mouth!”

Askel grinned. “He said kiss and make up.”

“You're the worst kisser ever! That was like kissing...a flipping fish!”

Offended, Askel put his hand on his hip. “That's because I was just trying to irritate you. I'll have you know I'm known for being a rather good kisser.”

“On what planet?” Freyn demanded.

“I have 1000 credits that says I can get you aroused with one kiss.”

“You're on.”

Freyn watched his brother smugly, confident that Askel would completely fail.

But when Askel took his head in his hands and then began tenderly prodding his mouth open, kissing him with excruciating sweetness, he felt his limpness become that which is no longer limp; indeed, an undeniable hardness controverted his claim of apathetic reception.

“Fuck,” he breathed, when Askel pulled away. “All right. You win.”

Grinning triumphantly, Askel turned to Odi for some acknowledgement of his victory.

Odi just shook his head. “I think I may be sick.”

“Tai, when are we eating?” Askel demanded, as Tai emerged from the kitchen. “I'm starving and this food smells so good!”

“Go ahead and sit down. Let me see if I can persuade Master Iason to join us.” Tai went to the master bedroom, pausing for a moment to watch the great Blondie as he soothingly wiped his pet's hair away from his face with a cool cloth, leaning down to kiss him on the forehead.

“Master, I'm sorry to bother you, but dinner is ready,” Tai said, softly.

“I will not be eating,” Iason replied, without turning.

“Yes, Sir,” Tai murmured, backing away.

He'd anticipated that Iason would not want to leave Riki alone, even for a moment. So he returned to the kitchen and there retrieved a plate of food he'd made up especially for Iason, and a tray, along with a glass of Aristian Red Emperor, the Blondie's favorite wine. He took these to the master bedroom again and boldly entered, setting up the tray near Iason.

The Blondie looked up at him, surprised.

"Forgive me, Master," Tai said, "I know you said you would not eat, but you did not eat much last night nor all day, and you will lose your strength and become ill yourself if you do not eat something. So I'll just leave this here for you in case you change your mind. The wine is Aristian Red Emperor, which I believe is your favorite."

The smallest hint of a smile tugged at Iason's mouth. He was a bit surprised at Tai's assertiveness, but since he knew the youth was looking after his best interest, he did not begrudge him his boldness in entering uninvited after Iason had dismissed him.

In truth, he was famished, and the aroma of the stew and fresh bread was irresistible. He also saw that, in addition to his favorite wine, Tai had made a double chocolate torte, his favorite dessert. With the tray conveniently brought to him, he could stay by Riki's side should his pet need him, so there was really no reason why he should not take his dinner.

Tai seemed to be waiting for his response, looking a bit fearful that he would be scolded.

"The food looks superb, as usual, Tai," he said, softly. "Thank you for your...thoughtfulness."

Beaming from his master's proffered praise--which was rarely given--Tai returned to the great hall and joined the others, who had been waiting impatiently.

"Is he coming?" Askel demanded.

"No."

"Idiot. That's why Tai took his food to him," Freyn remarked.

"Then we can eat?"

Tai nodded.

This was met with exclamations of relief as the crew immediately began to eat. Tai, however, bowed his head and spoke silently to Armah, adding two small prayers for Riki and Daryl, and a third for his younger sister, Asjahta, who he missed dearly. His fourth prayer was for forgiveness for turning away from his promised path, for Tai knew that soon it would be impossible for him to become a priest, even if he desired it. He intended to give himself to Odi; not tonight....but soon.

* * *

Katze was in such a rush at the hospital that he did not even wait for the elevator, taking the stairs two at a time as he ran up to Reconstruction. Making for the Recovery wing, he was so preoccupied with getting to Daryl before he woke up that he turned a corner too fast, colliding into Raoul.

"Watch your step," Raoul snapped, angrily.

"I'm sorry," Katze mumbled, "that was quite my fault."

"Indeed it was," the Blondie agreed, though softening a bit at Katze's acknowledgment. "Did you find Iason's mongrel?"

"Yes. Well, actually, Iason found him, though we're not quite sure how he managed it." Katze was impatient to move on but since the Blondie had addressed him, he now had to wait to be dismissed.

"Hmmm." Raoul suppressed a smile, imagining the punishment Riki got for running off. "Where was the mongrel hiding, then?"

"Dana Burn."

Surprised, Raoul puzzled over this for a moment. Then he noticed Katze's obvious impatience and narrowed his eyes. "What are you doing here anyway? And why was Iason here earlier?"

"Daryl's just had surgery," Katze replied, visibly anxious.

"Oh? What's wrong with him?"

"He was thrown across the room and his kidneys were damaged," Katze replied, coolly. He said nothing more, but his eyes conveyed his anger.

Raoul blinked, suddenly realizing that Daryl was in the hospital because of something he had done. Daryl--the one who'd bit his ear. Although he did not really care what happened to the Furniture, he could see that Katze bore some sort of affection for him--and Iason, too, judging from his even bothering to come to the hospital.

"Then," he said gently, "I shall not detain you." He stepped aside and Katze gratefully passed him, nodding his thanks.

Katze made his way quickly to Daryl's room, dismayed when he found him wide awake.

"Oh sweetheart," he whispered. "I'm so sorry. I wanted to be here when you woke up."

Daryl smiled. "That's okay. The nurse--that one blue-haired lady--told me that Riki ran away."

Katze rolled his eyes, sighing. "Yes. I'm gonna kill the bastard as soon as he's better."

"What do you mean? Did you find him? Is he sick?"

Katze nodded. "Iason found him. He's got some...viral infection or something. But fuck Riki. How are you? How's the pain?"

"It's not bad. They gave me something for it. But the lady told me I have two perfectly good kidneys now." Now he lowered his voice, giggling. "She's treating me like a prince. She keeps fluffing up my pillow and bringing me ice chips."

Katze shook his head. "Iason does it every time. She used to be a total bitch."

"I know!"

Smiling, Katze leaned down and kissed him. "Anyway, you seem like you're in good spirits. I expected you to be more...I don't know...helpless or something."

Now Daryl frowned. "Do you want me to be more helpless?"

Katze laughed. "I want you," he whispered, "to be well so you can come move into my apartment."

"And then we can make love every night!"

Now Katze fell silent, looking a little uncomfortable.

"What is it?"

Katze sighed. "I guess I should just tell you. Those devices...we can't use them anymore. Heiku said your synthetic kidneys can't handle the G-waves. In fact...what we were doing was hurting you, Daryl. I'm sorry. It's...my fault for introducing you to them."

Daryl studied Katze for a moment. He was disappointed, but the last thing he wanted was for Katze to feel bad about it. "That's all right," he replied, softly. "It was fun while it lasted. We can still...love each other. Like how we did before."

"Yeah." Katze gazed down at him, love shining in his eyes. "We can always do that."

"Although it's too bad we can't convince Iason to get us restored, the way Raoul did for Yui." Daryl said it without really thinking about it, just a wishful thought. But as soon as he said it, he and Katze stared at one another, the possibility suddenly occurring to them both.

"Daryl! Why shouldn't we ask Iason to restore us? I mean...we're leaving his household; there's technically no reason why we should still be modified!" Excited, Katze swiped a hand through his hair, considering. "He just might do it! I mean...if Raoul did it...and Iason's not one to go completely by the rules anyway...shit. Dammit!"

"What?"

"Well, we can't ask him any time soon. I'm up for some punishment for Riki's running off during my watch."

"He's going to punish you?" Daryl exclaimed, dismayed. "Oh Katze! He's not going to whip you again, is he?"

"I don't know. He...didn't say. He just said, whether you're sorry or not, you're being punished," Katze answered, imitating Iason's cool, silky soft tone of voice.

"But it wasn't really your fault!"

Now Katze smiled. "And how would you know that?"

"Because I know Riki," Daryl retorted, stubbornly. "He's the one that ran off."

"Truthfully, I am a bit at fault. I should have known better than to trust him to go outside alone, and without his chains."

Although...in my defense, Iason could have told me he wasn't wearing his pet ring."

"Riki didn't give a thought to you or what would happen to you," Daryl continued, angry. "That little... brat!"

"Yeah, I must admit, I'm rather pissed at him at the moment."

"Maybe Iason will let you punish him."

"From what I saw earlier today, he's already been punished. Iason did a number on him, too. His ass was covered with whip marks. A C1-kasey, I believe--that's what Iason was carrying when he brought him home. Fuck! We're talking about Riki again! Fuck Riki...let's talk about YOU."

Daryl sighed. "So...you really think Iason might...agree to have us restored?"

"I don't know. We'll wait until the moment's right...and then I'll ask him."

"That would be...amazing, Katze."

Now Katze sat down on the bed next to him, taking hold of his hand. "We shouldn't count on it, though. It's more likely he'll say no."

Daryl nodded, though his eyes conveyed his hope.

"Your color looks so much better than before," Katze remarked, brushing the hair back from his eyes.

"Katze?"

"Yes?"

"I want you to kiss me."

Smiling, Katze obeyed the mandate, holding Daryl's head in his hands as he kissed him slowly and thoroughly, pouring every bit of the love in his heart into that kiss. And though he'd told Daryl not to hope for restoration, now Katze desperately wanted it, not even so much for himself, but for Daryl. He longed to hear his lover cry out, to give him the pleasure he had never been able to give--not even with the G-wave devices, really. Much as they'd enjoyed the devices, Katze knew there was something intangibly different about a natural orgasm. He longed for a deeper intimacy that came only with being inside a partner, the incomparable pleasure of

penetration, or of giving oneself up for submissive acquisition. Unlike Daryl, Katze knew--or at least vaguely remembered--what it felt like to love and be loved as a fully equipped male, and he wanted the same for his lover.

If he had to, he'd get on his knees and beg Iason to help them.

* * *

As soon as Omaki opened the door, Aki came running.

"I missed you!" he shouted, hugging Omaki's legs.

Smiling, Omaki picked him up and kissed him on the cheek. "I missed you, too. Even though I've only been gone an hour."

"Sir Yousi!" Aki exclaimed, when he saw the Blondie.

"Hello, Aki," Yousi replied, smiling. He rather liked the little boy, who Omaki sometimes brought with him to the bondage shop, although he had been known to knock over a few displays from time to time. Still, Yousi didn't mind cleaning up after him, and found him far more interesting than many of the customers that came into his shop. "Are you a commander today?"

Aki was wearing a helmet, a cape, and carrying a purple laser gun. "I'm Commander Aki," he replied, solemnly.

"I thought so. You're not going to shoot me with that are you?" Yousi asked, a little nervously.

Aki giggled. "It's not real."

"It looks real," Yousi remarked, thoughtfully. "Is it a hologram?"

Aki giggled again. "It's real, but it doesn't have...laser thingies inside." He arched his fingers, moving his hands toward each other, apparently to illustrate the laser properties which were sadly-- or perhaps thankfully--lacking in his laser toy.

"Oh." Yousi returned the smile. "Ah yes. No laser thingies. Then I'm safe."

"But I can still squirt you!" Aki yelled, surprising Yousi with a blast of water.

“Aki,” Omaki said, putting the boy back down. “You just yelled in my ear. And you shouldn’t have squirted Yousi--now he’s all wet.”

“I’m sorry, Sir Yousi,” Aki mumbled, looking a little sad.

Yousi, who had been rather startled at being squirted with water, studied his tunic for a moment, then smiled. “No harm done. But if we’re going to be fair about it, I should be able to squirt you.” He leaned down in a mock threatening manner, reaching out as if to grab him, eliciting a squeal of delight from Aki who then ran out of the room.

Enyu, Kahlan and Ru all came into the great hall to see what the commotion was.

“Ah, Ru. I need you to make an Aristian chocolate cake tonight. Can you do that?”

“Of course, Master,” Ru answered, eagerly.

“Mmmm,” Kahlan moaned. “I haven’t had one of those in ages.”

“It’s my favorite cake,” Yousi announced.

“Yousi will be staying with us tonight. Ru, it seems a bit chilly. Why is there no fire?”

“I’ll start it,” Kahlan offered, grinning at Ru. “He needs to get busy on that cake.”

“I’m sorry, Master,” Ru answered, staring at the fireless hearth and feeling a bit foolish. He’d been daydreaming again...about Kahlan, actually, and had let the fire die out.

“Don’t let it happen again,” Omaki replied, with a sly smile, “or I shall have to spank you.”

Ru stared back in disbelief, wondering if Omaki was teasing or not.

Enyu, feeling a bit neglected that his master had not even greeted him properly, and a bit jealous of Omaki’s promise to spank Ru--which he was sure was intended as a fun kind of spanking, not a nasty Iason Mink sort of spanking--now pouted. “I want to be spanked, too,” he announced.

This immediately garnered Omaki's full attention. "Oh, you do, my pretty pet?" He walked toward him, tipping his chin up. "Are you quite sure?"

"I meant if you were going to spank Ru," he replied, a little uncertainly.

"I see." Omaki smiled, his eyes sparkling mischievously. He bent down to whisper in his ear. "Then perhaps I shall spank you later. Come to my bed tonight, pet."

"Yes, Master," Enyu answered, excited.

Yousi, a little confused by all the talk of spankings, looked around the great hall, admiring its beauty. It seemed very familiar, though he could not specifically remember coming there before. Then his eyes rested on a messenger capsule that was lying on a small table. He immediately walked toward it, mesmerized.

There was...something...about that container. Something important.

He studied it for a long moment, his brow furrowed together.

Omaki, who suddenly realized what Yousi was looking out, watched him, his heart racing.

Slowly, Yousi picked up the container and simply held it in his hands.

Suddenly, a series of images flooded his thoughts--his computer, some...computations of some kind...his villa...and he was writing...writing in a journal. But what? What was he writing? Yousi thought with all his might, feeling that it was somehow very important. His head felt as though it would split open.

He dropped the capsule, which went crashing into the table, shattering the glass. He brought his hands up to his head. "I'm sorry...Omaki," he whispered.

Omaki was immediately at his side, coaxing him to sit down. "There's not a thing to be sorry about. Not a thing, old friend."

"That capsule," Yousi began, then shook his head.

Omaki, though desperate to know exactly what Yousi had remembered, felt that the Blondie needed some calming down.

"Ru. Bring Yousi some tea--make sure it's a relaxing blend."

“Yes, Sir.”

“Relaxing, Ru,” Omaki repeated.

Ru nodded, immediately making for the kitchen, followed by Kahlan and Enyu, who, perceiving that something was amiss with the great Blondie, decided they’d best give their master some privacy with him.

“I broke your table.”

“The table be damned,” Omaki replied. “I was going to throw it out, anyway. It’s no good for anything except putting things on.”

Yousi, actually catching the humor, smiled. “You’re a good friend, Omaki.”

Omaki was touched; the way Yousi looked at him--his whole manner of speaking--was so much like the old Yousi that he was momentarily rendered speechless. “I will always be a friend,” he replied, finally.

“Something’s happening to me.”

Omaki nodded. “I can see that.”

“Do you know what’s happening to me?”

“No, Yousi, I don’t. Although what it seems like--and I really don’t know how this is possible--but it seems as though maybe you’re starting to...remember.”

“Yes,” Yousi agreed, eagerly. “I’m starting to remember. But what am I remembering? Will you tell me, Omaki? What happened to me? Why did Jupiter...take away my memories?”

“I promise I will tell you, when the time is right,” Omaki answered, gently. “Let’s not move too fast, here. I don’t quite understand how you can be having any sort of memories, so I don’t want to... move you into new territory, too fast.”

“I don’t want to move, either,” Yousi replied, blinking. “I like my house.”

Omaki smiled at this.

“And here we are! Tea and biscuits,” Ru announced, bringing in the tray.

This garnered Yousi’s immediate interest, as he raised his head to peek at the tray and see what sort of cookies he’d brought.

“Chocolate butter cookies!” he exclaimed, delighted.

At that moment, Aki came running back into great hall, having heard the word “cookies” from the closet where he’d been hiding in hopes that Yousi would come after him.

“Aki!” Omaki shouted, leaping to his feet and scooping him up before he ran barefooted into the broken glass.

Surprised, Aki looked down at the glass and, realizing that his master had just saved him from certain injury, reached up and kissed his cheek. “I love you, Master,” he said, with unaffected sweetness.

Omaki, suddenly overcome with emotion, held him tight, closing his eyes.

The others watched this tender display, silent. They all knew that Omaki was heartbroken that Aki was leaving; in fact, all of them were rather saddened by it. Aki brought life and excitement to the home and would be sorely missed.

“I’ll clean up this glass,” Ru muttered, kneeling to pick up the broken pieces.

“I’ll help you.” Kahlan knelt down as well, gifting Ru with a heart-stopping smile.

Ru returned the smile, blood rushing to his groin. Was he mistaken, or was Kahlan flirting with him?

“I love Aristian chocolate cake,” he whispered. “Can I watch you make it?”

“Of course,” Ru whispered back.

“You’re squeezing all my air out,” Aki complained, finally.

“I’m sorry, my little love,” Omaki answered, relaxing his hold. “You’re so squeezable. It’s hard to resist squeezing you.”

“But if you squeeze too hard, what if my head pops off?”

Omaki laughed. “You needn’t worry about that.”

“Can I have a cookie?”

“If you eat it in the kitchen, then yes, you may have a cookie.” Omaki set him down away from the broken glass and then gave him his snack.

Ru and Kahlan carried the larger pieces of glass to the trash unit; then Ru sent in the floorbot in to sweep up the rest.

Pacified with the acquisition of the wanted chocolate butter biscuit, Aki dutifully went into the kitchen, excited when it became apparent that Ru was going to bake a cake.

Yousi, having eaten four cookies in fairly rapid succession and one and a half cups of tea, suddenly put his teacup down on the tray.

"I am tired," he announced.

"Would you like to go to bed now, Yousi?" Omaki asked. It was early in the evening, but his old companion looked as though he could use a good night's sleep.

"Yes. But I don't have a bed to sleep in here."

"Of course you do. I'll show you. I have plenty of guestrooms. Come, I'll take you to your room."

With a sigh, Yousi rose, following Omaki down the hall to a room, where he immediately lay down on the bed.

"Would you like...a night shirt, Yousi?"

"No. I am too tired to change. I am just going to sleep like this."

"Then...good night, old friend."

"Good night, Omi."

Omaki stood still for a moment. Yousi had not called him by that name since...well, since the Academy days. It had been Yousi's special nickname for him. He shut the door behind him as he left, puzzling over Yousi's returning memories.

He went to the kitchen, where Aki was standing up in his chair. "We're making a cake!" he proclaimed.

"Yousi's gone to bed."

Aki, completely perplexed at the notion of a Blondie going to bed before he did, simply stared at him in disbelief.

"What about the cake?" Ru asked.

"We'll have it tomorrow. Go ahead and make it tonight, if you like." Now Omaki turned to Aki. "You've finished your cookie, I see. Time for your bath."

"But I wanna help bake the cake!" Aki yelled.

“Hush, Aki,” Omaki said, sharply. “Yousi’s trying to sleep. Now, you heard me. Go take your bath NOW.”

“No!”

Omaki took two steps forward and, grabbing the boy’s arm, proceeding to administer a few sharp whacks to his bottom. “Mind me, Aki. Do you want me to get out the paddle?”

“No,” Aki whispered, smarting from the smacks and suddenly remembering how much he disliked being punished.

“Then do as I say.”

Aki sighed and crawled down off the chair, trudging off to the bath hall.

Now Omaki turned to Enyu, who had been watching the scene, leaning back against the wall with his arms folded across his chest. “Come, pet,” he commanded, with a little smile.

“Now?”

“Yes, Enyu. Now.”

Omaki reached out and grabbed his wrist, then led him to the bedroom, where he locked the door behind them. “We have just enough time, I believe.”

“Time for what?”

“Time for your spanking. And a nice little fuck, I believe.”

“You’re not really going to spank me, are you?”

“Oh yes. What? Aren’t you the one who asked for it?” Omaki’s eyes shone impishly as he watched Enyu’s obvious discomfort.

“Yes, but...that is, you’re not going to spank me very hard, are you?”

“I shall spank you precisely as hard as I want.”

“But how hard is that?”

“Hard.”

“But,” now Enyu backed away until he bumped into the bed.

“You should see the look on your face. Priceless.” Omaki whispered, smiling as he approached him. “Have you forgotten how we discussed this not so long ago? I said I thought you needed a good spanking.”

“But...Master...I’d really rather not.”

Omaki laughed, then sat down on the bed. "Good. That makes it more fun for me. Now, pull up your robes."

Enyu did so, a bit embarrassed that he was aroused, despite all his protests.

Omaki noted his erection, trying to suppress a smile, then pulled him firmly over his knees, pushing his robes up to his back. "So, my naughty little pet wants a spanking," he whispered, his voice trembling just a bit from excitement.

"Not...not really," Enyu stammered.

"Isn't that what you said earlier? You announced it in front of everyone in the great hall. It's too late to take it back now, Enyu. You wanted a spanking, and I certainly want to give you one."

"But I thought you said it was better if I didn't want it!" Enyu cried, confused.

"It's better if you wanted it before, but now that it's imminent, you don't want it," Omaki hinted. "That's the game."

"Then you're not really going to spank me?"

Omaki laughed. "Oh yes. I most certainly am."

"I don't like this game!"

"Hush, pet," Omaki commanded, his voice now stern and uncompromising, though he was suppressing a smile. "In my house, we play whatever games I wish to play, whenever I want to play them."

With that, Omaki proceeded to give him a good, hard, sound spanking, much to Enyu's complete mortification and dismay. He had privately expected the Blondie to hold back, but his master did not. He struggled not to cry out, embarrassed that Kahlan and Ru could most likely hear them. But eventually the strong Blondie broke him down, and Enyu began pleading for a cessation to his punishment.

Omaki was enjoying himself thoroughly, relishing Enyu's desperate squirming on his lap, his gradually darkening flesh, and his adorable little whimpers and cries. "Naughty pet," he scolded, grinning.

Enyu, feeling keenly the injustice of being called naughty when he had done nothing wrong, managed to reach back and try to cover his bare ass from further assault. The Blondie, delighted, grabbed his hand, pinning it firmly with the other against his back as he continued to spank him. "I'm not sure I'm spanking you hard enough," he commented, giving him a few exceptionally strong whacks.

"You are! You are spanking me hard enough!" Enyu cried, now rather anxious for the discipline game to end. "Harder than Master Iason, even!"

"Oh, so Iason spanked you, did he?" Omaki raised an eyebrow at this, wondering what else the Blondie did to the enticing Xeronian. "Did you engage in coital pleasures as well?"

"What?" Enyu whimpered, confused.

"Did he fuck you?"

"Yes," Enyu admitted. "Ow! Oh! Please stop, Master!"

"And did you enjoy it, pet, when Iason took you?"

Now Enyu was smart enough not to reply, only crying out from the continuing onslaught on his smarting flesh.

"Answer me, pet! Did you enjoy it?"

"Yes! Yes, I enjoyed it."

Omaki suddenly felt an unexpected surge of jealousy. He now unleashed a full assault on Enyu's backside, eliciting even more anguished whimpers and vocalizations.

"But...not more than you, Master!" Enyu finally managed.

Pleased, and now fully aroused at the site of his pet's blushing bottom bent so vulnerably over his knees, Omaki suddenly stopped, lifting Enyu up and tossing him face down on the edge of the bed, so that he was bent over it. Licking his fingers, he inserted them into his pet's ass, Enyu's muscles clamping down tight upon entry.

"Relax," he ordered, impatient. "I want you now, pet. I can't wait."

Enyu desperately tried to relax his muscles, but found he was too upset to do so. His ass was still stinging from the spanking, and he felt a bit confused by the Blondie's behavior.

Sensing his unhappiness, Omaki pressed his body against him from behind and began whispering in his ear. "Come now, Enyu. Be a good pet for me. I promise later I will pleasure you however you want. You can even take me, or punish me if you choose. Anything you want."

"Anything?" Enyu repeated, smiling slyly.

"Anything pet. We'll play your game later."

Consoled and not a little excited by this offer, Enyu was able to calm down enough to relax his tight grip on the Blondie, all his thoughts now bent on this promised "game." Omaki wiggled his fingers inside him, smiling. "There's a good boy," he whispered.

Then, withdrawing his fingers, he released himself from his skin tight leather pants, and slowly penetrated, groaning as he slid past his pet's portal and into his depths. Enyu winced, his Xeronian physiology preventing him from ever truly being broken in, a trait that made sex, in the initial moments, always painful for him, though undeniably pleasurable for his partners.

"Mmmm," Omaki moaned. "You feel so hot and tight, pet."

The Blondie relished his embrace for a few moments before he proceeded to fuck his pet rather wildly, grunting all the while as he pulled back on his hips, digging his nails into his flesh. On his knees with the Xeronian bent over the bed, Omaki was able to straighten up to get a good view of his phallus sinking into his pet, and to catch glimpses of Enyu's ass, still reddened from his spanking. Finding all this excruciatingly erotic, the handsome Blondie's arousal escalated to completion faster than he might have liked, but the fuck was so incontrovertibly sweet that he could not help himself, and within moments cried out his release, ejaculating hard into his pet's receptive sanctum.

"Sweet Astrajia," he murmured, as he slowly faded back into awareness. "That was the best fuck yet."

At that moment, Aki could be heard running through the house. Omaki withdrew, sighing. "I'm sorry, pet. You'll have to wait until later, when Aki's in bed."

"Yes, Master," Enyu chirped, happily.

Omaki smiled. "Your mood seems to have improved a bit. Are you looking forward to playing your little game?"

"Yes," his pet admitted, grinning.

Laughing, Omaki helped him get up. "You have an agenda worked out for me already, then?"

Enyu nodded, his eyes twinkling.

"Oh dear. Perhaps I offered myself up too quickly."

At this, Enyu's face betrayed his worry that Omaki would withdraw the offer, inciting another laugh from the leather-clad Blondie.

"Don't worry, pet," he whispered, tipping his face up to him and stroking his cheek with his thumb, "I never go back on a promise."

Reassured by this, Enyu smiled. "Did you enjoy that, Master?" he purred, knowing full well how the Blondie would respond.

"You know I did," Omaki whispered, bending down to kiss him. "You were exceptionally good. And I promise I won't spank you too often. Ah, but," now he shivered slightly, "it did excite me terribly. And once Aki's not around to spank, I shall have to spank someone every once in awhile, just to show I'm master of this house."

"Spank Ru," Enyu suggested.

Omaki laughed. "I will be sure to tell him you ordered it."

"No, don't tell him," Enyu pleaded. "I wasn't serious. And he might put a...frog or something in my soup."

"Good. Because I don't want to spank Ru. I want to spank you."

Enyu, looking decidedly unenthusiastic about this announcement, elicited another laugh from the Blondie.

"I wish you could see your face, pet. You...amuse me."

"Master!" Aki yelled, having completely forgotten Omaki's mandate to be quiet.

"Aki," Omaki growled, annoyed.

"Don't be too hard on him. I think we were pretty noisy in here just now," Enyu pointed out.

“Even so. I told him to be quiet.” Omaki got up and went out into the great hall, where he found Aki running in a wide circle, making a very loud, bizarre noise for no particular reason.

“What did I tell you, Aki?” Omaki scolded, scooping him up. “Yousi is trying to sleep.”

“But I’m a hovercraft!”

“Did you hear what I just said? Settle down now, it’s almost time for bed. You need to wind down.”

“But I don’t want to wind down!” Aki screamed.

Without another word, Omaki sat down, pulled him over his knee, and gave a few quite hard, warning spanks, resting his hand on his bottom. “Do I need to give you a real spanking tonight, Aki? Shall I get out the paddle?”

Aki, lying limply over his lap, suddenly realized his peril. “No.”

“I’m not going to warn you again. Do you understand?”

“Yes. I’ll be good now. I promise.”

“Very well.” Omaki lifted him up, setting him on his lap.

Now completely docile, Aki leaned back against him, sighing. “Why did Sir Yousi go to bed so early?”

“Because he was tired.”

“Did he break the table?”

“Yes, little one.”

“Is he getting a spanking?” Aki demanded.

Omaki smiled. “No, Aki.”

“Why not?” Aki asked, indignant that Yousi should be spared a spanking that he certainly would have gotten, had he broken the table.

“Because Yousi is grown up.”

“So when I’m grown up, I can break things without getting spanked?”

“I don’t know about that,” Omaki replied, quickly.

“But you just said--”

“Yousi is also a Blondie. An Elite.”

Aki fell silent for a moment. “What am I?” he asked, finally.

“You, my darling boy, are going to be my pet one day.”

“Then why am I going to that school--the Academy for Leets?”

“Because Master Iason wishes you to be raised as an Elite,” Omaki replied, suddenly feeling a little nervous about the conversation.

“But you said I'm going to be your pet.”

Omaki sighed, gathering his thoughts before he spoke again. “What I meant, Aki, is that I very much want you to be my pet one day. But Master Iason wishes you to be raised as an Elite so you can decide for yourself what you want to do.”

Aki thought about this for a moment, his head resting against Omaki's chest. “Can I still be a Commander if I am a pet?” he asked, finally.

“No,” Omaki said, quietly. “If you are a pet, you will belong to your master. That means you would belong to me.”

“Oh.” Disappointed, Aki began playing with the straps on Omaki's leather vest. “And if I am a Leet, I'll belong to myself?”

Smiling, Omaki did not reply, but kissed the top of his head to force back the rising tide of emotion that threatened to overtake him.

“You have plenty of time to think about what you want to do,” he said, finally.

“But...what exactly is a pet?”

“You know what a pet is, Aki. Enyu is a pet. A pet is...a servant that gives pleasure to his master in special ways.”

“You mean like sucking your penis?” Aki asked bluntly, remembering what he had inadvertently witnessed one day in the great hall.

Omaki smiled at this. “Yes, Aki. That and other things.”

Now for the first time Aki suddenly had a glimmering of what his master expected from him one day. And he found there was a wide gap between this role of pet and what he had planned for himself-- to become a great military Commander and take over all of Amoi. But he loved his master and wanted to please him. Troubled by these thoughts, he began sucking his thumb.

“Aki,” his master whispered, gently, “you're a bit old to be sucking your thumb now. Have you forgotten what a big boy you are?”

“My head hurts,” he whimpered.

Startled, Omaki immediately felt his forehead. “You don't feel warm,” he stated, relieved. “You have a headache, though? Let's see what we can give you for that.” He stood up, carrying Aki into the bath hall where he found the appropriate analgesic.

Aki swallowed the pill, drinking the entire glass of water and then resting his head on Omaki's shoulder. “I'm tired, Master. I wanna go to bed.”

“All right.”

Omaki carried him to his bed, a bit puzzled over Aki's sudden change in behavior. He had never before asked to be put to bed and he was worried that their conversation had been initiated prematurely, and that Aki had found it disturbing.

Placing the boy in his bed and helping him get settled under the covers, the Blondie sat on the edge of the bed for a moment, stroking his temple with his thumb. “Aki,” he whispered finally. “What I want most for you...is for you to be happy. Right now you should just enjoy being young. There's no need for you to worry about the future.”

Aki smiled at this, closing his eyes with a contented sigh. Omaki bent down and kissed him, but continued to stay with him for awhile until he was sure the boy was sound asleep.

* * *

Odi opened the door with a mischievous smile. “Please come in,” he said, with a playful little bow. “You are most welcome.”

“I thank you,” Tai replied, returning the bow. “Sorry I'm late. I wanted to...shower before I came over.”

“You could have showered here--with me,” Odi teased. “But no matter; you're here now. What do you drink?”

“White wine, please.”

“Anything in particular?”

“Do you have White Icarian?”

“Um...I think so.” Odi opened the wine cabinet and checked the bottles. “Yes! We have it.”

Tai smiled. “Perfect.”

“So you're a wine drinker, huh?” Odi said, opening the bottle with a smart pop. “You're more refined than me.”

“What do you drink?”

“Bourbon.”

Tai shuddered. “Yuck.”

“You're not a bourbon lover, I take it?” Odi laughed.

“No. I mean...not to insult your...tastes or anything,” Tai added, quickly.

“I'm not insulted. I'm proud to be a total barbarian.”

“I don't know about that. Barbarians probably drink...stout or something.”

“Well, I'm a barbarian for other reasons, then.” Odi handed him his wine with a smile. “You might regret coming here tonight. I might just have to tie you up and ravish you.”

Tai giggled a little nervously, unsure if he was teasing.

Odi laughed. “You're not quite sure about me, are you? Do you really think I'd take you by force?”

Unable to reply, Tai took a sip of his wine, staring at Odi over his glass with wide eyes.

“You are so adorable,” Odi murmured. “I really am tempted to rape you right here and now. But don't worry. I won't.”

“Okay.”

“Okay?” Odi laughed. “Well, maybe I won't rape you. But...how about a little kiss?”

“You mean...right now?”

“Right now.”

Tai bit his lip, feeling a bit uncomfortable with how fast things were moving.

“What's wrong?” Odi demanded. “You don't want to kiss me now?”

"It's not that," Tai answered.

"Because I thought," he said, as he approached him, "that you were pretty responsive a while back in the kitchen."

Tai instinctively took a step back, still holding his wine.

"You're afraid of me," Odi accused.

"A...a little," he conceded.

"You don't trust me?"

"Well...it's just that...we're alone together in your room. So it's...different than the kitchen."

"How is that different?" Odi moved closer, now kissing Tai's neck.

"Because...there's no...bed in the kitchen."

"Is that what you're afraid of?" Odi whispered, nibbling on his earlobe. "That I'll drag you off to the bed and have my way with you? Didn't you know I was teasing before?"

"I wasn't sure."

"I just want a kiss. Can I please have a kiss?"

Tai swallowed, suddenly a bit aroused from Odi's closeness. When the bodyguard began running his hands down his body, he moaned, shivering.

Odi smiled. "That's it." He took Tai's wine glass and set it aside on a nearby table, then pushed Tai up against the wall. Then, rubbing his body up against him firmly, he began to kiss him.

Tai felt as though the floor had fallen away; he went completely limp, held up against the wall by Odi's body. The bodyguard's tongue explored his mouth with exquisite slowness, moving in all the right ways, slowly, confidently, firmly. At that moment Tai felt that he would not be able to resist whatever Odi demanded of him.

When Odi finally stopped, pulling away, his eyes dilated with desire, Tai was almost disappointed. He suddenly found that he wanted him to continue, wherever that continuance might lead.

"See? Just a kiss. I'm a good boy."

"What if...I don't want you to be a good boy?" Tai whispered, looking up at him seductively.

Odi felt as though his heart had just stopped. "What's that? What do you mean?"

Tai suddenly felt anxious. "I don't know what I meant."

"That's called teasing, Tai," Odi scolded, shaking his finger. "That's very naughty."

"I'm sorry."

"That's...all right, but now...I have to punish you."

"Punish me?" Delighted, Tai stared back at him with wide eyes.

"Yes, naughty boy. But I haven't decided yet what I'm going to do." He tilted his head to the side for a moment, rubbing his chin. "I think...a few strikes with my belt should do it." With a slow grin, he began unbuckling his belt.

"You're not...really going to do that, are you?"

"Oh yes. I must teach you how very wrong it is to tease someone. Especially me. That's gotta be nipped in the bud." Odi whipped his belt out, then grabbed Tai's wrist, his eyes sparkling. "All right. Let's do this properly."

He led Tai over to the divan, and started to bend him over it. "Wait. You deserve this on your bare ass. Drop those pants."

Giggling, Tai did so. Odi then bent him over the back of the divan and gave him a few strikes with his belt, just enough to get his point across and without really hurting him. He had only meant to have a little fun, but once he saw Tai positioned so invitingly, he began to have other thoughts.

"Ow!" Tai cried, smiling. He was rather enjoying being punished and was a little disappointed when Odi stopped. But when he started to straighten up, Odi pushed him back down.

"Don't move," he whispered, suddenly pressing his body against him from behind.

"What...what are you doing?" Tai asked, a little fearfully.

"I'm just holding you. But now...I want you to suck on my finger." He put his finger up to Tai's lips, demanding access.

"Why?" Tai asked, confused.

"Just do it."

Tai obeyed, feeling a bit foolish.

“Now...since you teased me so shamefully, I think I'm entitled to a little something, don't you?”

“I don't know,” Tai replied, anxiously.

“I do. One finger, Tai. I'm going to insert one finger. All right?”

“What do you mean?” Tai cried, panicking.

“Hush. Just relax.”

“I don't know,” Tai repeated, and then gasped when he felt Odi pull his hips away from the divan and reach around to fondle him. “Ohhh,” he moaned, unable to help himself.

“Yes,” Odi whispered. “That's it. You're going to like this, I promise.”

Odi began kissing the back of his neck as he continued to fondle him, sending shivers down Tai's back.

“Are you ready, Tai? I'm inserting my finger now.”

Surprised, Tai held his breath when he felt Odi penetrate him with his finger, slowly thrusting a bit as he continued to stroke his now completely rigid erection. Now gripping the top of the divan, Tai felt overcome with sensations as the bodyguard continued to pleasure him. He found that he rather liked Odi's finger inside him; it was not at all what he expected, but the sensations that coursed through his system were undeniably pleasurable. Without even realizing it, he began panting and moaning.

Thrilled with Tai's vocalizations, Odi was now sorely tempted to simply take him, fairly confident that now he would not resist. But he decided to hold back; it was probably better to take things slow.

“Odi,” Tai cried. “I'm going to come!”

“Yes,” Odi whispered, excited. “Come for me, Tai. Don't hold back.”

Tai obeyed this mandate without even meaning to, crying out so loudly Odi almost laughed. He heard Askel or Freyn pound on the wall to express their dissatisfaction with the level of noise emanating from the room and made a mental note to kick one or both of their asses at a later date.

Tai was completely oblivious to anything but his orgasm, enjoying the most pleasurable ejaculation he could ever remember having. His semen shot into the divan, dripping an errant design down the dark upholstery. Odi, pleased with his accomplishment, was also rather eager for some relief himself, and so turned Tai around.

“Did you enjoy that?” he asked.

Tai nodded, unable to speak.

“Then, will you return the favor and pleasure me with your mouth?”

“Like how you did for me before?”

“Yes. But then...I also want you to do something else for me. Will you do it?”

“I'm not ready,” Tai replied, nervously.

“Not that. I mean...something else, very intimate. Something you can do...with your tongue.”

“Oh,” now Tai fell silent, wondering what Odi meant.

Smiling, Tai stroked his cheek. “Are you truly so innocent? You don't know what I mean?”

“No.”

“Perhaps I should wait for another time, then.”

Tai frowned. “Well, what is it? Tell me what it is and then I'll decide whether I want to do it.”

Now Odi leaned forward, looking into his eyes. “I want you to put your tongue inside me.”

“You mean kiss you?” Tai's brow furrowed, betraying his confusion.

“Not in my mouth. Well...yes, in my mouth, but other places, too. I mean inside me, Tai. Up my ass.”

“Oh.” Trembling a bit, Tai found that he was rather surprised at the request, having never heard of such a thing before. But his upbringing had kept him very sheltered from all things sexual, for as a priest he would have been expected to remain celibate. He swallowed, considering.

“You're appalled.”

"No." Tai shook his head vehemently. "I'm just...surprised. Why...why do you want me to do... that?"

Now Odi smiled. "Because it feels very good, Tai. I'll show you, if you like."

"No thank you," Tai replied, quickly.

"I imagine you'll change your mind one of these days. But I'll wait until you ask for it. So?"

"Well," Tai whispered, "I don't know how to do it."

"There's nothing you need to know. You just stick your tongue in and move it around."

"All right."

"Yes?" Odi's eyes widened. "Seriously?"

Tai nodded.

"Then...we'll probably be more comfortable on the bed. And...would you very much mind if we both got completely undressed?"

Tai, who was already half-naked, decided it wasn't much of a step to take off the rest of his clothes. "Okay," he agreed.

Grinning, Odi took his hand and led him to the bedroom. "Let me take this off," he whispered, pulling off Tai's shirt. He eyed Tai's body, pleased with his taut muscles and well-formed physique. "How is it you're so fit? Do you play a sport?"

"I swim," Tai replied. "On Aristia I swam every day. And I used to run on the beach."

"Well, you've got one hell of a body." Odi pulled off his own shirt, tossing it aside, and Tai gasped when he saw the bodyguard's extremely well sculpted upper body, his chest muscles flexing as he took off his pants.

"So do you," Tai whispered. "You're...you're beautiful."

Smiling at his sincerity, Odi now stood, completely naked, hands on his hips. "Beautiful, eh?"

Tai nodded. "Oh yes." He reached out and touched his arms, marveling over his muscles, then slid his hand down his abdomen to his groin, then on down to the top of his thighs. "You're the most... beautiful man I've ever seen."

Flattered and now rather aroused, Odi answered this by pulling him close and kissing him. He longed to throw him on the bed and violate him completely, but he forced himself to rein in his desires. Tai was going to pleasure him in another way; that would be enough.

He took hold of the boy's hand, guiding him down to his erection. "Stroke me," he whispered in his ear. Tai did so, and Odi closed his eyes, shuddering. Then he opened them, and led Tai to the bed. "Let's lie down together."

He lay down, holding out his hand to Tai, who climbed on the bed a little tentatively, very much aware that was now getting into bed, naked, with another man. "You promise you won't take me?" he asked.

"I promise not to take you...until you're ready."

Nodding, Tai lay down next to him. Excited, Odi pulled him on top of his body, kissing him urgently, his hands sliding down his back to grab his ass. He began spreading Tai's cheeks, his erection aching as he did so.

"Oh Tai," he groaned, biting his lip.

"What should I do?"

"Kiss my chest. And then my abdomen. Keep kissing all the way down my body until you get to my cock, and then pleasure me with your tongue for a bit."

"Like this?" Tai began kissing Odi--sweet, gentle kisses, slowly working down his body.

Odi groaned his response, thrusting his hands into his hair. Suddenly impatient, Odi pushed him down faster. "Suck me," he pleaded.

Tai obeyed, licking and sucking the tip of his cock, though uncertain exactly what he should do.

"Open your mouth more," Odi commanded. "Take me into your mouth, Tai."

Tai did so, and then instinctively gagged. "I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"It's all right. You'll learn. Try again."

This time Tai had a bit more success, managing to fit his cock partway into his mouth.

"That's good," Odi encouraged, raising his head to watch him. "That's very good, Tai. Move your tongue around a bit."

When Tai did so, Odi let his head fall back on the bed, groaning. "Holy fuck. That's perfect, darling."

Surprised when Odi called him "darling," Tai stopped, looking up uncertainly.

"Don't stop," Odi pleaded. "Do this just a bit more."

Tai obeyed, and after a series of low groans, Odi finally stopped him. "All right. Now I want you to go further down, like we talked about. Use your tongue all the way down. I'm going to hold my legs apart for you."

Clasping his hands behind his thighs, Odi pulled his legs toward his chest, opening himself for him. As Tai began slowly licking along his perineum to his anus, the bodyguard began shaking with excitement.

"Right there, Tai," he whispered. "Lick me right there. And....stick your tongue in."

Tai did so, his tongue squeezing past the tight sphincter, eliciting another low groan from Odi, who was in utter ecstasy. "Pump me with your other hand, Tai! And don't stop!"

Odi's excitement pleased Tai, who complied with his request, pumping him as he continued to pleasure him with his tongue. He could feel the bodyguard trembling.

"Stick your tongue in further," Odi ordered, gasping. "Oh yes. Just like that...just...oh god...oh--"

The bodyguard broke off into a sex cry, startling Tai. He withdrew, watching him in amazement as he arched his back and cried out. Tai was sure he had never seen anything more beautiful in all his life.

Now relaxed, Odi opened his eyes, smiling up at him. "That was...I can't even describe." He held out his hand, beckoning him. "Come here, angel boy."

Tai did so, and Odi took him into his arms, holding him tight. "Stay with me tonight," Odi whispered. "Say you will. I don't want you to go."

"All right," Tai agreed, smiling, and snuggling in the bodyguard's arms. He could not ever remember feeling happier than he did at that moment.

* * *

Riki tossed fitfully, mumbling incoherently. Occasionally he cried out for Iason. But the Blondie was most disturbed by the way his pet frequently called out for Guy and, even more puzzling, for Kei.

At first, Iason could not quite place Kei. Then he remembered that Kei was the mongrel who was trying to take over Katze's market--the one that hadn't been there the day Riki visited Bison--the one that, if he recalled correctly, was Guy's new pairing partner.

But why was Riki calling out his name? Worried, but also a little jealous, Iason now began to suspect that perhaps his pet still harbored feelings for Guy after all...and that he viewed Kei as some sort of rival to his old lover's affections.

It wasn't that surprising. After all, Riki had apparently spent the entire week in Ceres with Guy. So why should he be surprised if his pet still cared for his old pairing partner?

Iason tried to put things in perspective. After all, Guy was only a mongrel. It was absurd to be jealous of a mongrel.

And yet, the Blondie found that was precisely how he felt: jealous. Extraordinarily, absurdly, darkly jealous.

Iason stayed with his pet all night. At one point, Riki woke up, reporting that he needed to relieve himself.

The Blondie picked him up and carried him to the bath hall. Riki, too weak to resist, let his head fall against his chest. When they reached the bath hall, Iason propped him up and helped him complete his task, holding his organ as he passed his water. Though

Riki would normally have been mortified, he was so weak that he was grateful for Iason's help.

"Thank you," he mumbled, as Iason picked him up again.

"No need to thank me, love," came the Blondie's soothing reply.

"Can I get you anything?"

"Were you stroking my hair before?"

"Yes, pet."

"I liked that." Riki closed his eyes, suddenly too weary to speak any more.

"That's right. Go back to sleep," Iason encouraged, laying him back in bed. He sat down on the bed next to him, stroking his hair the way his pet wanted. He was pleased that Riki had finally spoken coherently, for his delirium had been exceedingly worrisome.

Riki quieted, no longer crying out. His fever broke around dawn, and Iason was there to witness it, for the great Blondie never left his side nor slept while his pet lay ill. And although Iason did not believe in divine actors that could influence the course of events on Amoi, that night he had found himself praying anyway, out into universe, desperate for something greater than himself to watch over his beloved pet, and to give him health and strength.

Trust and Obedience

Riki suddenly became aware of Iason's presence--his warm body next to him on the bed, the feathery-light tickle of his hair on his arms and chest, his intoxicating, distinctive scent. How long had Iason been there? Riki felt as though he had been drifting in a sea of dreams forever; a dark, frightening place where he had been continually tormented by the decomposing corpse of Kei calling out to him from his watery grave, begging Riki to hold his hand. But Iason had been there, too, pushing into his awareness with a comforting warmth, a light guiding him away from the phantoms of his dreams.

Shuddering, the mongrel opened his eyes, trying to shake the image of Kei from his mind.

Iason bent down, concerned. "Are you cold?"

"No," he answered. For a moment he felt a bit stunned; Iason almost seemed to be glowing, he looked so beautiful. "You...have a light around you."

Iason furrowed his brow, perplexed. "A light? You're hallucinating, my love."

Riki shook his head. "No. It's...all around you...and around your head--like a halo. Oh," now the mongrel blinked, confused. "It's gone now. But it was there, I swear."

Iason picked up the vitalmeter and scanned him, finding that his fever had dropped to only 100.5. "Much better." Relieved, he bent down and kissed the mongrel's forehead. "I've been so worried about you, pet."

“What happened?” The last thing Riki remembered distinctly, he was riding in the car with Iason; the Blondie was scolding him. After that he simply seemed to slip into another realm.

“You have a virus. Something unusual. Riki, did you go into the ocean when you were at Dana Burn?”

For a moment, Riki fell silent. Why was Iason asking him such a strange question?

“Did you, pet? Why aren't you answering me?”

“I might have,” he replied, evasively. “It's hard to remember exactly. Shit...my ass is fucking killing me.”

“I imagine so. Although you deserved every single strike.”

Riki sighed, hoping Iason wasn't planning to start scolding him again.

But the Blondie now grew serious, his voice low and intense. “Why, Riki? Why did you run away?”

“Because... I just...was sick of having to depend on you for every little thing. Like my smokes. And you never let me go anywhere; you keep me locked up this penthouse like some animal. And also,” now Riki desperately tried to think of more reasons, feeling very acutely his own bewilderment over why exactly he had run away, “you keep punishing me. Real hard, too. I mean, you tamed me that morning for practically no reason. And then made me lick your boot. I mean, I can understand sometimes I do shit and deserve to be punished, but do you really have to discipline me just for forgetting to call you Master? Can't I like...say 'yes, Master infinity' now or something so you know I always mean Master even if I forget to say it? Because I can't fucking remember.”

Iason smiled at this. “Pet,” he sighed.

“And...you promised to let me tie you up, but then you fell asleep.”

“Now Riki,” Iason chided. “Don't try and tell me that's why you ran away.”

“Okay maybe not, but can I still tie you up?”

“That's a discussion for another time. I want you to tell me why you ran away, Riki. All of Amoi was looking for you; it's rather

discomfiting to have such an intractable pet. Although, that's not my main concern. What I really want to know is how you could do this, when you told me, just a day or so ago--uttered with what I took to be veritable probity--that you belonged with me." Iason's voice fell to a whisper. "Did you mean it, pet? Or were you just being obsequious to patronize me?"

"You talk like those books in your library," Riki complained. "I can't understand half the words you use."

"If you do not understand me, then perhaps we need to work on expanding your vocabulary."

"Fuck no," Riki protested. "I already know all the words I'll ever need. Don't be so...ao... condensing."

Iason smiled, bending down to kiss him on the forehead again.

"What are you smiling at?" his pet grumbled.

"The word I think you meant is condescending, pet," Iason answered.

"Oh. Well," now Riki squirmed a bit, uncomfortably aware of his burning backside, "give me a break. I didn't attend some fancy Academy. The only education I got was learning how to stay alive in the slums."

"You didn't have any sort of schooling?" Iason asked, incredulous.

"Well, the Orphanage had something they called a school, but after I ran away I was pretty much on my own."

"So it seems this is not the first time you've run away," the Blondie remarked, softly. "But you haven't answered me, Riki. Why did you run away? You said you belonged with me."

Now Riki sighed. "Bloody hell, I don't know. It was just...one of those moments. I saw my opportunity and took it. I was having...a real bad day. And then once I'd taken off, I knew I couldn't come back without being punished. I don't know, maybe I would have come back eventually."

Iason leaned closer, studying him. "Would you? Would you have come back, Riki?"

“Yeah, probably. I mean...I really didn't have anywhere to go. I couldn't hide out there forever. Speaking of which....how the hell did you find me?”

Iason shook his head. “I'm not really sure. I...used my mind. Like before.”

Excited, Riki sat up. “You mean you used the halo to find me?”

The Blondie smiled. “Yes, I believe so.”

“Then...you do have special powers.”

“Perhaps,” Iason conceded. “Although it appears to come at a price.”

“You mean the headaches?”

“Yes, pet.”

“Are you going to do what I suggested and find a slum doctor?”

“I'll talk to Katze about it. Right now he's at the hospital.”

“The hospital! Fuck! I bet he's pissed as hell at me!” Riki winced as he remembered how he had run off, leaving Katze to deal with the fallout. “How's Daryl? Is he okay?”

“He's fine, Riki.”

“Did you punish Katze?”

Iason shook his head. “Not yet. But I fully intend to.”

“Please,” Riki begged, “please don't punish him, Iason. Let me take his punishment.”

“No, Riki. You were in his charge; he must be punished.”

“But he didn't do anything! I'm the one who ran away!”

The Blondie was firm in his decision. “It was his responsibility to be certain nothing happened to you. He should never have let you out of his sight.”

Sighing, Riki lay back down. “Fuck. He'll hate me forever now.”

“Master,” Tai said, from the doorway. “Toma is here.”

“Ah. Yes. I'll be right there.”

“Who the fuck is Toma?” Riki demanded.

“I told you already, pet; Toma is the new Furniture replacing Juthian. I must go and welcome him now; can I get you anything before I go?”

“Yeah. How about a smoke?”

“No, pet. You mustn't smoke while you're sick.”

Surprisingly, Riki did not argue. “All right,” he sighed. His chest hurt and his lungs felt heavy; he had to admit, it probably wasn't a good idea to be dragging on a cigarette at the moment. He closed his eyes. He felt tired...but he didn't want to fall asleep again. He didn't want to dream. “Wake me up if I fall asleep,” he whispered.

“You should probably rest, love.”

The mongrel opened his eyes. “Please. I don't want to sleep any more. I keep having all these... really bad dreams.”

“Very well. I'll have Tai bring you something to drink. And are you hungry? Do you think you could eat?”

“I don't feel like eating. I'll take that drink, though.”

Iason nodded, and then went to meet Toma.

Tai was standing with Toma in the foyer.

“Tai, could you bring Riki a drink? Some cold water or juice?”

“I'll do that, Master Iason, if you wish,” Toma answered, with a slight bow.

Iason smiled, pleased with the Furniture's initiative. “Excellent. Welcome to my estate, Toma.”

“Thank you, Master. It is an honor to be here.”

“Katze will be training you, but unfortunately he is not here at the moment. However, I'm sure with your experience, you won't need much guidance.”

“Thank you, Sir. I hope not.”

“Tai, could you show him the kitchen? Everything he...needs to know about in there. Then, Toma, I'll show you the bar.”

“Yes Master,” Toma answered.

“You mean...the cellar, too?” Tai asked, uncertainly.

“Yes, Tai.”

Nodding, Tai gestured to Toma, who followed him into the kitchen, marveling at its size. “This place is enormous,” he whispered. “And I've never seen a kitchen this big.”

Tai smiled. “Yes, it's a very nice kitchen.”

Toma pointed to the huge cutting block in the center of the room. "You have plenty of space for... chopping stuff, I guess."

Tai laughed. "Yes. And that's not just a table." He pushed a seemingly unremarkable portion of the block, and a small panel appeared, onto which he keyed the passcode. The top of the block split open and slid off, revealing a staircase. Doors slid open at the front of the block, allowing access to the stairway. "The code is 778. This goes down to storage, where we keep all the extra supplies and wine, and lots of other things. Actually, it's a secret. At least, from Sir Riki. Katze showed it to me. It has a passageway that leads to an emergency exit out of the penthouse. These stairs actually lead to an entire floor, directly beneath the penthouse; there's enough food and supplies to feed an entire army. You might need to go down there to get wine or something, but make sure Sir Riki doesn't find out about it."

"That's right," Toma whispered. "He ran away yesterday, didn't he? I heard the alert. Everyone's talking about it."

Tai shook his head. "It was...awful. We searched for him all day."

"Where did you find him?"

"Iason found him. At Dana Burn."

Toma's eyes widened. "Dana Burn? You mean...from the Revolution?"

Tai nodded. "I guess. I'm not...too familiar with Amoian history."

"That's where the rebels hid out when they were trying to take over. But Jupiter had it surrounded and waited for them to come out. But they never did. They just stayed inside until eventually most of them died. Then some of them, the ones left, finally came out. Jupiter didn't kill them, but she took away their citizenship, theirs, and their descendents, too."

"Mongrels," Tai whispered. "Like Riki, right?"

Toma nodded. "Right."

Tai closed the secret passageway, gesturing to the beverage dispenser recessed in the wall. "You've seen one of these, right?"

“Of course.” He stared at it. “Where's the keypad?”

“It doesn't have one. It's voice activated. Watch.” Tai stood in front of it until a red light began to blink, indicating it was aware of his presence. “Cold melon water with ice.”

A small door slid open, and a glass rolled forward; ice was dispensed, followed by the light peach-colored beverage.

“It has just about everything you can think of. The distributor comes once a week to be sure the tanks are full. Here's the panel for that,” Tai said, depressing a small button to open a panel in the wall, allowing access to the filling tanks. “You can scroll through the menu to check the level of the tanks, but if any beverage dips below 30%, the panel will show an alert.”

Toma nodded. “Who's the distributor?”

Tai thought a moment. “Some fellow with green hair. A bit strange, actually. Lor was his name, I think.”

Toma grinned. “Lor the Whore. Oh yes, I know him. He's Xian's distributor. He has a weird thing for Furniture, apparently. Always flirting with me.”

“Yeah,” Tai nodded. “That's what Daryl said. But...we'd better get back to Master Iason--he's waiting.”

“I'll take this drink to Riki, then.”

“He's in bed. I'll show you.”

“Is he...ill or something?”

“Yes. He has some...bizarre bug, I guess. Something strange.”

“Is it contagious?” Toma asked, worried. He absolutely deplored getting sick.

“No. Master Iason says you can only get it...in the ocean, I think he said.”

“The ocean?” Toma repeated, bewildered. “But...then...did Riki go into the ocean? In the middle of winter?”

Tai shrugged. “I haven't any idea. I suppose he must have, if that's the only place you can get it.”

Toma puzzled over this, following Tai to the bedroom. He looked around the great hall, impressed. “This place is...remarkable,” he whispered.

"It's very nice," Tai answered. Having grown up in a palace, Tai was quite used to opulence and luxury, and so had nothing else to compare it with. But Xian's house, although quite spectacular in its own right, didn't come close to the penthouse, with its high cathedral ceilings, skylights and grand windows. One side of the great hall, which led out to the balcony, was a single long, elaborate window, its panes dividing the glass into neat, triangular sections.

The effect was stunning, and the view amazing--from the heights of the penthouse at the top of Eos tower, the entire city stretched out below, as far as one could see. Since Eos was at the very hub of Tanagura, the city completely surrounded it, every window offering a spectacular panoramic view.

Toma couldn't wait to explore the place more; he couldn't believe that the entire floor beneath the penthouse also belonged to his new Master, with a secret passageway, too. Toma loved secrets. Especially telling them to others. He couldn't wait to get down the "cellar" and explore it more thoroughly. He was sure that it had to be more than just a pantry or wine cellar for the Blondie to devote so much energy to creating secret access and keeping it hidden.

"Riki," Tai said, softly.

The mongrel startled, looking confused. He'd already fallen asleep again, and to be woken by Tai and a complete stranger was rather disconcerting.

"Here's your drink, Sir Riki," Toma said. "I'm Toma, by the way."

"Oh. Yeah. Thanks." Riki sat up, stretching. "Bloody hell. I can't believe I fell asleep again. He was supposed to wake me up!" He took the drink, peering at it suspiciously. "What the fuck is this?"

"Melon juice. You...don't care for it?"

"Melon juice?" Riki sniffed it, curious.

"It's quite good," Tai assured him. "I'm sorry, I assumed you'd had it before."

"No, we don't get much melon juice in the slums. But I'm bloody thirsty as hell." Riki took a sip, his eyes lighting up. "Hey! That's...fucking good!" He drained the entire glass, holding it out

again and shaking it so that the ice rattled in the empty glass. "More please."

Toma laughed. "I guess you liked it."

"I'll get it," Tai said, nervously, taking the glass. "You'd better go talk with Master Iason. He doesn't like to wait long."

"Yeah, you'd better watch your step around here. He's got a wicked arm, if you know what I mean," Riki advised.

Toma nodded, smiling. Everyone knew about Iason's reputation as a hard master. It was also common knowledge that the Blondie was having difficulty taming Riki, his mongrel pet, and that he regularly disciplined his unruly charge. Of course, he'd also heard about his punishment at the Emporium, and before that the pets and Furniture were all talking about an incident when the Blondie was disciplining his pet in the presence of pavilion shop assistants, and that he'd nearly killed him using a C-20 kasey, apparently by accident. The blue-haired, blue-eyed Furniture couldn't wait to see Riki get disciplined again; he was rather fond of watching punishment, though rather less enthusiastic about receiving it himself.

As he returned to the great hall, he found Iason sitting in a chair by one of the huge arched windows, staring out at the city as though lost in thought. Toma stood, quietly, waiting for his new master to notice him. It was an opportunity to study the great Blondie up close; though of course Toma knew Iason Mink, he had never been in close contact with him before, and he found he was rather stunned at how handsome he was.

Although Xian, his former master, was certainly attractive--as were all Blondies--there was simply no one like Iason. There was also an intangible quality about the Blondie that Toma felt intensely attracted to, some paradoxical mix of gentleness and strength, of softness and power, grace and authority. His hair was the blondest of any he'd ever seen--nearly white, in fact. His posture was perfect, his poise elegant, almost disarmingly so. Toma wanted to stand there and look at him forever. He was thrilled to be at the Mink penthouse and anxious to please his new master.

Finally, Iason turned and, seeing him, nodded.

“Ah. Forgive me. I was...preoccupied.” Rising, Iason showed him the bar; they spent little time there, as Toma already knew his way around a bar and required no training whatsoever. Next Iason led him around the house. “I’ll wait for Katze to show you everything more thoroughly,” he remarked.

“Katze?” Toma was bewildered; Daryl was Iason's Furniture, not Katze. Or at least not anymore-- Katze now lived and worked in Midas.

“Yes.” Iason, seeing Toma's confusion, nodded. “Ah. Katze is only here temporarily, until Daryl has recovered. He's in the hospital.” Iason fell silent then, looking disinclined to discuss the matter further.

Toma was intrigued; why was Daryl in the hospital? Already there was some interesting gossip--he could sense it. Toma had a remarkable gift for ferreting out all things hidden. He wouldn't, of course, ask his master about it; he'd wait until later and ask Tai. Or perhaps the two cute bodyguards he'd met just outside Iason's penthouse.

At that moment, Odi came out of his room, nodding at Iason. “We need to discuss next week's security, Sir,” he began, looking a bit anxious.

Iason stopped him. “Yes, yes. Absolutely. We’ll have conference--sometime today, anyway.”

Odi nodded, his attention now drawn to Toma, who was trying to catch his breath. He was rather taken with the handsome bodyguard, especially his stern, dark gaze. “You're the new Furniture,” he stated. He turned to Iason. “Has he been entered in the system yet?”

“No. Please see to that, when I'm finished.”

“Would you like me to finish showing him around?” Odi asked, sensing that Iason was anxious to get back to Riki. “How is Riki doing?”

“Better,” Iason replied. “Yes, Odi. That would be helpful.”

Toma tried to suppress a smile at this; he was only too willing to accompany the bodyguard around the penthouse.

Iason immediately returned to his sick pet, who demanded to know, as he entered, why he hadn't woken him up.

"I fell asleep again and had another crappy dream. You said you'd fucking wake me up," he complained.

Iason smiled, relieved to see his pet's usual self returning full force as he itemized his grievances in typical mongrel fashion. "I was occupied."

"Well, I have to take a piss. I tried to get up, but I felt...too weak."

"I'll carry you," Iason replied, picking him up easily and taking him to the bath hall.

"Hey. Did you do this before?" Riki vaguely remembering being carried by Iason.

"Yes, my love."

"Oh. And did you...give me a bath or something?"

"Yes. Last night. To help bring down your fever."

"I thought that was a dream." Riki fell silent, remembering his nightmare of being in the water, and of Kei's corpse calling out his name. "My chest hurts," he moaned. "It's hard to breathe."

"The medics will be here in a bit. They inserted a dispenser into your lungs to help with that. You'll probably start coughing soon; you'll have to get rid of that phlegm."

"Great," Riki lamented. "Coughing up phlegm. I can't wait."

As they reached the bath hall, Iason set him on his feet, and began to stand behind him, ready to assist him again.

"What the fuck?" Riki demanded. "I don't need any help taking a piss!"

"Can you stand?" Iason asked, concerned, his arms still around him.

"I can stand," Riki replied, though a little uncertainly. "You wait outside."

Iason tentatively removed his hands, only to immediately grab his pet again when Riki started to fall.

“Fuck,” he whispered. “Okay, just hold me then. Let me do the pissing.”

As Iason did so, Riki had a vague memory of the previous night, recalling a similar scene in the bath hall. “You...did this before,” he said, suspiciously.

“Yes, pet.”

Mortified, Riki fell silent, feeling embarrassed at the sound of his stream hitting the urinal, and its strong, unmistakable scent. He told himself it was no big deal; there had been another time when he had been in the T-stand and Iason had...helped him, though for altogether different reasons. Still, he hated the idea of the Blondie witnessing nonsexual bodily functions. He couldn't explain why, but he was especially sensitive about maintaining his privacy.

“There's nothing to be ashamed of, my love,” Iason said, softly.

“Then how about you let me help you take a piss,” he replied, grumpily.

“If it pleases you.”

Now Riki smiled, placated by Iason's willingness to humor him. Although it would hardly be a victory if the Blondie felt no humiliation.

“I'm finished.”

As Iason carried him back, he sighed, enjoying the warmth and security of Iason's arms. Secretly he was glad to be back; whether he would have felt the same if Kei had not died at his hand, he wasn't completely sure. But there was no question that his Blondie master was a comforting presence, and Riki was starting to enjoy his attentiveness.

“Can I have more of that melon juice?” he asked.

“Of course, my pet.” Iason smiled down at him, relieved to have him back in the penthouse--and in his arms--again. “Riki,” he whispered, “I was so worried about you. Please, pet, promise me that you will never try to run away again.”

Riki, pleased that his master was asking him not to run away rather than commanding him, enjoyed the moment, relishing his

sudden power. "Maybe I'll promise," he answered, coyly. "If you promise to let me tie you up."

Iason suddenly felt overcome with love for his pet, a force that seemed to expand inside him, intractably uncoiling and pushing against the limits of his very being. He felt he could not bear the idea that Riki had run away because he didn't love him back.

He pulled him close, sighing. "You are so precious to me, Riki. You...hurt me tremendously."

The mongrel's smile faded as he began to more fully comprehend the depth of Iason's sorrow. Iason looked at him so intensely, and Riki could have sworn he saw a wetness shining in his eyes.

"I didn't mean to hurt you," he answered, softly. "It wasn't...about you. It was about my freedom. I was born with it so...it's hard when it's taken away. I guess...you wouldn't understand."

They were back in the bedroom and Iason lay him down in the bed, crawling in beside him and pulling him close.

"But...what I don't understand, Riki, is that why you didn't run away when I gave you a week of freedom? Or is that why you didn't come back, then?"

"No," Riki answered quickly. "I wasn't trying to run away then. I knew you'd find me. I was just... trying to piss you off, actually, because of...well, that misunderstanding."

"But you didn't answer my question. Why didn't you run away then? Why did you wait until you'd come back?"

"I don't know," the mongrel replied, sheepishly. "It never really occurred to me then." He hated this realization; it made him aware that in many ways he was already becoming obedient to his master.

"No?" Iason snuggled closer, nuzzling his neck.

"I was all preoccupied with being back in Ceres again. It was...strange. Seeing everyone. And it was weird how...they didn't even seem that surprised to see me again, I mean after the initial shock. It was like they didn't even really...care."

Except Guy, he thought. But then, Guy had disappointed him--they all had, in the end.

"And...they hadn't really changed all that much. I mean...I was the only one who'd really changed. I didn't really belong there."

Now Riki fell silent, wondering what Guy was doing, and how he was reacting to Kei's disappearance. How long would it be before Guy began to suspect something serious had happened?

Iason listened to his pet talk about the slums, noting the sadness that crept into his voice. Was he thinking about Guy? Jealous, he instinctively pulled him closer.

"Then...if I loosened your chain a bit, would you be happier?"

"What do you mean?" Riki was suspicious of his offer to "loosen his chain," remembering another time that he had promised to do so, only to have him followed as he went exploring Tanagura.

"I mean, I will allow you to go out into Tanagura, Riki, like the other pets. When you're well, that is. And you may go to the Saloon down on the main level."

"The Saloon?" Riki brightened at this; he'd never heard of it, but the name sounded promising.

"Yes. It's a tavern for pets. Perhaps it's time you started socializing a bit more."

"Hell yeah. They have drinks there, right?"

"Yes, pet."

"Do I have a limit or something?"

"No, provided you do not arrive home in a drunken state."

"Then...so that's where the other pets go, the ones who live in this tower thingy?"

"Yes." Holding his naked pet close had produced a predictable result in the Blondie, and he now felt the urge to take his pet, though he knew the time was not right, not while Riki was ill.

"Cool!" It had been nearly a year since Riki had done any sort of socializing with other pets, although he'd found them to be snobbish and rude, and he'd ended up punching Enif, a particularly arrogant pet who'd tripped him at a Free Party. Although Iason had strangely not seemed at all angry over the episode, Riki couldn't

help noticing that he never took him anywhere, and certainly not for a pairing. Not that he particularly wanted to pair with another pet--unless he got to do the fucking. But the Party had seemed at least mildly amusing, and the prospect of spending some time at this "Saloon" was decidedly appealing.

Now Riki became aware of Iason's erection and smiled. "You're horny."

"I'm afraid so."

"Do you....want something?"

The Blondie smiled. "No, pet. You're too sick. But," he rose, and went to close and lock the door, "I may relieve myself while I watch you." He had not attended to his carnal needs the previous day and was now nearly ready to burst.

"Just like old times," Riki replied, wryly. "Except I'm not in chains."

"Just lie back and rest. All I need is to look at you."

"If that's all you need, then how come you made me perform for you all those times?" Riki retorted.

"Because that's even more stimulating," Iason whispered. "But you needn't perform for me now. Though perhaps you could spread your legs a bit more so I can get a good look at you." The Blondie released his cock, already swollen and aching, from his bodysuit and stood, looking down at him. The mongrel, even sick, was breathtakingly beautiful, and as he lay sprawled on the bed, looking a bit weak and helpless, Iason was so aroused that he began pumping himself quickly right away.

Riki watched him, intrigued. He rarely saw Iason pleasure himself. Even when he'd first come to Eos, he always seemed to stay in the shadows, forcing him to perform in semi-darkness while he watched from a distance, shrouded and faceless. After awhile Riki began to catch glimpses of him stroking himself, but he never really saw him clearly, in the light, as he did now. Intrigued, he wished that he was feeling better so he could fully appreciate the performance.

Iason stood with his legs a bit apart, gazing at him with unveiled lust. His lips were parted and his breathing ragged, and now he began to gasp, his eyes rolling back, his pelvis thrust forward. His hand moved with perfected ease, masterful strokes that were so quick his pet couldn't see his fingers distinctly anymore.

"You're sexy as hell," Riki remarked, with a slight smile. "You have to do this for me sometime... when I'm not sick."

Iason opened his eyes and moaned, his ascent starting. "Oh pet," he gasped.

"You can come on me if you want," Riki offered, casually.

This was the deciding impetus; the Blondie ejaculated, his semen shooting up erratically like an erupting geyser as he groaned, biting his lip.

"Holy shit," Riki breathed, almost laughing, stunned by his master's rather impressive, hypnotically copious offering. "That's a lot of seed."

Iason sighed, relishing his release. He gaped down at his hand, which was dripping with his sex, and looked around for something to clean up with. Spotting Riki's clothes still on the floor by the bed, he picked up his pants, deciding that they had to be washed anyway.

"Yeah," Riki teased, watching him, "go ahead and wipe your smut juice on my pants. I like them that way."

Smiling, Iason prepared to do so, when suddenly something fell from the pant pockets, landing on the floor, and twirling around a bit before settling down. He stared down at it, perplexed. As he reached down to pick it up, Riki suddenly realized it was the pendant he'd taken from Kei.

"That's not...what you think," he said, urgently.

Puzzled by this remark, and now a bit suspicious, Iason picked up the necklace, and, with shaking fingers, examined it. It appeared to be of silver xylonium, and the pendant bore a glyph that Iason recognized--it was something commonly exchanged between lovers, something of a pledge of love. With trembling fingers he turned it over, his heart sinking when he read the words.

Love, Guy.

“Iason,” Riki began.

“What is this?” the Blondie demanded.

“It's not...like I said, it's not what you think.”

“Then what is it?”

Now Riki fell silent, looking extraordinarily apprehensive.

“You...kept his...love token,” Iason whispered, his voice shaking.

“No. It's not...that.”

“I can read Amoian, Riki. And I know perfectly well what this is. Why did you keep it?”

Riki shook his head, closing his eyes. “Please, Iason. I...don't feel so good.”

Studying him for a moment, the Blondie held his tongue, putting the pendant in his pocket. “I'm keeping this,” he answered, jealously. He was shaking now from hurt and confusion. When Riki had assaulted Guy so ruthlessly at Depravities, Iason had assumed that whatever feelings he had for his old pairing partner had waned. But to keep a love pendant in his pocket suggested that Riki felt far more for Guy than he was admitting.

But, his pet was ill, so Iason managed to push back his dark emotions until a more appropriate time to discuss the issue. “I'll get you that drink,” he said, a bit sadly.

“Iason,” Riki whispered. “Just...trust me.”

For a long moment master and pet stared at one another, an intense, intimate gaze that comforted Iason somewhat. He was sure that his pet was hiding something, but he also felt that he knew Riki. Perhaps there was an explanation for the pendant and why his pet had kept it. He would just have to be patient and wait until Riki was feeling better to explore the subject more fully.

“Very well, pet,” he replied, sighing. “I will trust you.”

He went to retrieve Riki's drink, but was stopped by Toma.

“Master, you have an incoming summons from Jupiter.” Just saying this made the Furniture tremble with excitement; he would never have imagined, just a few days before, that he would be informing his Master, Iason Mink, Head of the Syndicate, that Jupiter wanted to speak with him.

Iason nodded. He'd been expecting it; in fact, he was a little surprised he had not been contacted immediately when he'd issued an alert for Riki.

"Please bring Riki another drink. Whatever it was you gave him before."

"Yes, Master." Toma bowed obediently and hurried off to complete his task.

Iason went to the terminal, trying to calm himself before he spoke with Jupiter. He felt certain he was in for another reprimand.

"Why have you not come in?" was Jupiter's greeting. "You have not been here for several days, and the trade convention is fast upon us."

"My apologies. I have been...occupied at home."

"I'm aware of the alert. A runaway pet, Iason? Surely this should convince you that your persistence in keeping this recalcitrant mongrel is misguided."

Iason was silent, rather reluctant to encourage the conversation in the direction it seemed to be taking. Jupiter had already given him license to keep Riki for a full year; why must he argue with her yet again?

Sensing his displeasure, Jupiter changed tactics. "You are needed here, Iason. You are the Head of the Syndicate. Your presence is always wanted, but most especially now."

"Forgive me, but I am also trying to work out security arrangements for Commander Voshka's visit next week, as he will be staying with me."

"The Commander is staying with you?" Jupiter's surprise puzzled Iason, who assumed the conversation had been monitored and that Jupiter already knew.

"Yes; in fact, I wanted to speak with you about it. My head of security is concerned."

"As he should be. You will require an entourage. I will arrange for full protection. How many men are in his retinue?"

"25."

“Then, you shall have 50. I will send thirty automated units and twenty men.”

“That...seems a bit extreme,” Iason replied, softly.

“The entire structure will need to be secured. We're taking no chances. Do you suspect that he is coming to investigate Anori's death?”

“I don't know,” Iason admitted. “Although my gut feeling is that it is entirely a political visit, to reestablish the trade flows.” Privately, the Blondie also felt the Commander seemed more interested in pursuing him sexually than anything.

“Your gut feeling,” Jupiter repeated. “The concept eludes me. Since I do not possess it myself, I cannot evaluate whether this perception is valid or not.”

“My own view is that instinctive reactions are a type of logic. But the analysis is processed at the subconscious level, below awareness. The outcome of the analysis produces the visceral reaction conveying the conclusion,” Iason remarked, desperately hoping to distract Jupiter and prevent a return to the topic of his pet.

“Fascinating. I would enjoy continuing this conversation at a later time, Iason. As for today, however, I expect to see you at the Syndicate terminus by this afternoon. Do not let your private life interfere with your work. You have disappointed me, Iason. Do not do it again.”

Wanting to object, but wise enough not to, Iason lowered his eyes, accepting the reprimand. He could not help feeling shame at being scolded. His innate drive to excel, coupled with the Academy mandates to serve Jupiter, drilled into him from his earliest, most formative years, made it especially difficult to be told he had disappointed her.

Satisfied that Iason was sufficiently admonished, Jupiter paused before continuing, “Of all the Syndicate Heads that have come and gone, you are my favorite, Iason. I depend on you. Tanagura--all of Amoi--looks to you. What you do and say have repercussions that you probably cannot fully appreciate. I am not

only speaking of the mongrel, but of matters far more grave. So, Iason, I must ask you to reaffirm your allegiance to me. Would you ever turn against me?"

Iason felt as though his heart had stopped. Jupiter knew. Or at least suspected....something. But what did she know? And how? Did she know about Yousi's logs? Had she overheard his conversation with Omaki?

"Do not answer me now, Iason. I want you to come to my chambers today where we can discuss this face to face."

"As you wish," Iason replied, struggling to maintain his composure.

Jupiter ended the transmission abruptly, leaving the Blondie staring at a blank screen.

He felt shaken to his very core. Jupiter was asking him to reaffirm his allegiance? Horrified, Iason mulled over the possibilities. The worst case scenario was that she knew everything. About the logs, his conversations with Omaki. But then, as he considered this, it made no sense. If she knew, she would not hesitate to punish him immediately.

Therefore, Jupiter was merely suspicious and had no real evidence that would guarantee his punishment. Iason tried to calm himself; he knew how to play Jupiter. Now was not the time to lose his head. It would require all his abilities to seduce her into believing she could trust him, but he was confident he could do it.

Still, the conversation had left him feeling a bit ill.

He needed a drink.

"Toma," he called.

Toma immediately appeared, having listened to the entire conversation from the shadows, thrilled at what he had just witnessed. It was the most exciting gossip he'd ever encountered, and this was but his first day at the penthouse.

"Bring me some wine."

"Yes, Master." He rushed to the bar and deftly uncorked a bottle, bringing the Blondie his wine in less than a minute.

As Iason took the glass from him, he reached out and grabbed his wrist. "I know you were listening," he whispered. "Make no mistake, Toma. What you heard must remain confidential. If I discover you have told anyone, I will punish you so severely you will wish you never came into my household."

Horried at the threat, Toma nodded. "Yes, Master Iason. I won't tell." Disappointed that he was now prevented from sharing this truly delectable bit of gossip, Toma also felt a bit frightened of his new Blondie master. The look in his eyes was completely different now; he looked menacing, dark and uncompromising.

Iason released his wrist, satisfied by the look of sheer terror on the boy's face. "You have been very obedient today," he remarked, now more softly. He felt a little sorry that he had been forced to threaten Toma on his first day in his household, but there was no helping it. Now Katze's words about Toma being an incorrigible gossip worried him.

Unable to reply, Toma merely nodded.

At that moment, Katze returned to the penthouse, greeting Iason.

He then turned to Toma, nodding. "Ah. You're here. I apologize; I should have been here to make you welcome."

"No matter. How is Daryl?"

Katze smiled. "Good. Very good, in fact. So--"

"Katze," Iason interrupted. "You can train Toma tomorrow. Right now we need to take care of your punishment."

A bit surprised, Katze paused for a moment before nodding. "All right, then." He waited, desperately hoping he was not going to be whipped.

"Your punishment is the same as Riki's. 50 strikes with a C-1."

50 strikes. It would not be pleasant. But Katze was relieved that he had been spared a whipping with the MXV Emperor.

"Strip from the waist down, and put your hands face down on the table."

Katze did so, feeling a bit humiliated that Toma, who he was to train, was about to see him exposed and soundly disciplined.

The whip was still on the bar where Iason had left it the night before; he retrieved it now and walked toward Katze, all his anger at him now rising to the surface.

“Katze. I left Riki in your charge yesterday. For failing your duties, I hold you equally accountable with Riki. Therefore your punishment will be the same.”

With that, Iason whipped back his arm and unleashed his fury, eliciting gasps of alarm from Katze, who pressed his palms hard into the table as though it would somehow lessen the pain of the blows. He was furious with Riki, feeling keenly the injustice of being punished for something the mongrel had done.

Iason gained some satisfaction from Katze’s gasps and small, choked cries, but felt it was not enough, now putting the weight of his body behind every strike. At strike 14 Katze began to cry out openly.

“Does this answer you?” Iason demanded. “If you ever fail in your duties again, Katze, I won’t hesitate to put you back in the T-stand.”

Now the Blondie found that he was angry not just at Katze, but also at Jupiter; he was also exceedingly jealous over the pendant he’d discovered, its disturbing message tormenting him. Unfortunately for Katze, he was taking the brunt of his frustration.

Toma watched in disbelief, eyes wide. 50 strikes with a kasey? Now that he was witnessing the renowned Blondie in action, his former longing to see some discipline in the Mink household had waned, rather remarkably so. Iason’s threat to punish him made the entire scene almost sinister; he wondered if his master had intentionally chosen to discipline Katze immediately after threatening him, to emphasize his point.

Odi and Tai watched from the kitchen, opening the door just a bit. Katze’s cries were now heart- wrenching; although a whipping with a C-1 was nothing compared to the MXV Emperor, it was nevertheless clear that Katze was suffering.

“Stop.” Riki stood in the bedroom doorway, holding onto the frame for support. “Please stop, Iason.”

“Riki. Get back in bed at once,” Iason replied, without even pausing.

“No! I won’t!” Riki screamed. “Stop it! He didn’t do anything! Punish me! Let me take the rest!”

Annoyed, Iason stopped. “Pet! What did I already tell you? Now turn around and get back into bed, or I will punish you, once you're well again, for interfering. I told you. You can't take his punishment.”

“Please stop. If you stop, I'll tell you. About the pendant.”

Now Iason suddenly hesitated. It went against his better judgment to give a reprieve on Katze's punishment, after he had just announced in front of the entire household that he would not do so. But...he was extraordinarily anxious to know what the pendant meant, and what his pet was hiding from him.

Katze listened to all this, suddenly feeling a surge of gratitude toward Riki for trying to save him from the rest of his punishment. He had no idea what they were talking about, but he desperately hoped Iason's silence meant that he was considering the offer; he was only at strike 28, and his buttocks and thighs burned something wicked.

Iason had come to a decision, partly because, when distracted by Riki's appeal, he'd lost count of the strikes, and did not want to admit this to his watching household. But more than that, he wanted to know what his pet had to say. The pendant was still in his pocket and felt like a heavy weight, pulling on his heart. He was worried that this might be his only opportunity to discover the truth; he was convinced that Riki would not make such an offer, only to lie to him. One thing he had learned about his pet--he had a certain kind of integrity.

“Very well. Just this once. Katze, you may go.”

Relieved, Katze quickly dressed, half afraid that Iason would change his mind. He'd never known the Blondie not to follow through on his words, and he didn't know what it was that had compelled him to do so now, but he was marvelously relieved. He'd

been soundly punished, in his view; privately he wondered how Riki had endured all 50 strikes.

Iason held out the whip to Toma. "Put this away. Tai will show you where."

Toma nodded, casting a curious glance after the Blondie as he followed Riki into the master bedroom and shut the door behind them.

What was it that Riki was going to tell him, that had made Iason change his mind so quickly? What was this 'pendant' Riki spoke of?

The household was now hushed, everyone straining to hear what was being said behind the closed door.

A Mongrel's Consequence

Almost the moment Iason stepped inside the master bedroom, Riki collapsed from weakness. The Blondie caught him, picking him up with one swift movement and carrying him to the bed.

“Pet,” he whispered. “I told you to stay in bed.”

“I know. But I could hear you punishing Katze.”

“Even so.” Iason lay him down gently in the bed, tucking him in. “I told you he would be punished. And make no mistake, Riki. You were very naughty to leverage my confusion over the pendant to cut short his punishment. It won't happen again. But...I want to know the truth.”

Riki made no reply, feeling a bit smug and almost bewildered that he had actually managed to end Katze's punishment session. It was unlike Iason to bend to his tactics. He could only presume from this that his master really wanted to know the story behind the pendant.

And Riki, strangely enough, felt like telling it. What he had done at Dana Burn was like a burden pulling on his heart, and the mongrel wanted the Blondie's comforting, his soothing reassurance that everything would be fine.

“So.” Now Iason removed his glove, pressing a hand to his forehead. “You feel a bit warmer now.” He scanned him with the vitalmeter and confirmed that his temperature had risen a bit, to 102. “Perhaps we should put off this conversation until later.” Much as Iason was desperate to know Riki's secret, he didn't want his pet exerting himself while ill.

Riki shook his head. “No. I want to tell you now.”

“Very well, pet.” Iason waited, trying to calm himself. His heart was beating a cadence faster as he braced himself for a confession of love that he very much did not want to hear. But at the same time, he wanted to know the truth about his pet's feelings.

Now Riki closed his eyes, swallowing. “It happened...at Dana Burn.”

Iason puzzled over this for a moment. “What happened, Riki?”

“Something...terrible.”

The Blondie waited, wondering what Riki meant.

“Iason...I...when I was at Dana Burn,” he began, then stopped. Suddenly he felt his throat constrict as if the words he was about to say had amassed there, refusing to proceed. He knew he had to tell Iason at some point. The killing had to be formally announced to someone. That was slum law. But he dreaded saying the words. And he worried what sort of punishment Iason would have for him after he confessed his transgression.

“When you were at Dana Burn,” Iason prompted. “What happened, my pet?”

“The pendant,” he continued, his voice barely a whisper. “It doesn't belong to me.”

“No?” Iason's brows furrowed as he tried to make sense of his pet's rather garbled explanation.

“No. It was...Kei's.”

Kei. The name Riki had cried out while he was delirious--the mongrel who was challenging Katze's position in the black market. The pairing partner of Guy. Iason waited for his pet to continue, afraid now that Riki would confess to stealing the pendant out of jealousy.

“Then...how did you acquire it?” he prodded, softly.

“I took it from him. After...after,” Riki stopped again, wanting to continue but at the same time feeling strangely reluctant to say the words.

“After? After what?”

“After I...killed him.”

Finally. Having admitted it, Riki felt wondrously relieved, opening his eyes and looking directly at Iason.

The Blondie was actually rather surprised with this confession. It wasn't at all what he had expected. In the space of a few words, his fear that Riki had stolen the pendant was now replaced with the revelation that his pet had murdered Kei.

"You...killed him?" Iason repeated, stunned. The thought of his pet committing such an act was almost unthinkable. When he thought of Riki misbehaving, he imagined his pet engaging in more marginal, negligible transgressions--tossing objects from the balcony and other similar grievances-- mischief that was trivial, almost absurd. But murder?

And yet...he understood only too well the passion that could drive someone to take another life.

"Yes."

"Explain," he replied, breathlessly. "Did you kill him...because you were jealous?"

Riki blinked, perplexed with this accusation. "Of course not. Why would I be jealous?"

"I meant...of his relationship to your old partner. To...Guy."

"Nothing like that. No. He'd come...for the reward you put out. I don't know how he found me but... he did. And he had a knife. He threatened to cut up my face. The next thing I knew, he was on the ground after I'd shot him with my laser." Now Riki squinted his eyes shut, trying to block out the image of Kei's face as he died. "It was...horrible, Iason. All that blood. And...the way he begged me to hold his hand."

"Oh pet." Iason leaned forward and brushed the hair back from his forehead soothingly. He knew what his pet was feeling...all too well. He remembered with horrifying clarity the night he had killed Anori. Although at the time he had been too angry to feel anything but justified in killing the ambassador, over the years he had revisited the episode many times, deeply regretting his rashness and cruelty in murdering the young Alphazenian, whose only crime was catering to Raoul's insatiable sexual appetite. With the arrival

of his brother Voshka now imminent, Iason had been thinking about Anori more than usual, so he understood perfectly his pet's private torment.

He almost wished he could share his own secret and unburden his heart. But he knew that he could not; much as he loved Riki, he did not trust him to keep such an important matter in strict confidence. And it was much more than his own life that was in danger should the Commander discover what had truly happened to his brother. Amoi could theoretically become a pawn in the general's military aspirations, and it was not completely inconceivable that Voshka would exact revenge for Anori's death on all of Amoi.

Although Iason felt fairly confident that Jupiter could prevent such an incursion, any sort of rift with their most important trading partner would be deeply unsettling, generating negative repercussions in all sectors. Since the Commander's overthrow of the Senate on Alpha Zen, trade had slowed nearly to a halt. The entire Sector had been declared unstable. With imports and exports effectively frozen, already this development had caused tremendous market uncertainties, driving up prices ridiculously on certain items and hurling the entire black market to Ceres into chaos. Slum riots were not out of the question, if the situation continued, and the Blondie was not completely sure how Jupiter would handle another insurrection.

At the very least, things could get very messy.

So for a number of reasons, Iason kept his secret to himself.

"Is that why...you went into the ocean? To clean off the blood?" he asked, gently.

"To get rid of the body." Riki closed his eyes, remembering the cold seawater that seemed to seep into his very bones, chilling him to the core, and how Kei's body seemed to refuse to be carried away by the waves.

Iason nodded, the scene now making sense. He remembered how Riki had been naked; this had puzzled him exceedingly at the time, but now he understood. "But why...did you take the pendant?"

“For Guy. To send to him. With...some sort of compensation.”

This was not unusual; since mongrels had no legal status, their deaths were not even investigated by the Midas Police. Any sort of grievance against a mongrel was dealt with through compensation--though usually this involved some sort of meeting with an arbitrator to settle the matter.

Now the Blondie felt a bit alarmed. “You don’t mean to confess this to...Guy?” he asked, concerned.

Riki nodded. “At some point. He deserves to know.”

“No, Riki. I cannot let you do that.”

“But...I have to. You don’t understand.”

In Ceres, the slum of Midas, a certain street code prevailed. Murders and other transgressions were openly announced and then compensation decided, usually at a public meeting between the parties involved and all their supporters.

“I told you no, pet.”

“But...it’s the mongrel way!”

“That may be the case,” the Blondie replied levelly, “but I am not a mongrel, and you are no longer living in the slums. We’ll handle matters my way. I have no problem with your providing compensation for this mongrel’s death, but you’ll not identify your hand in it. If you do, your life could be in danger. I believe blood-vengeance is sometimes demanded, or am I mistaken?”

“That’s true,” Riki conceded. “But I don’t think Guy would ask for it.”

“I’m not going to let your safety be decided by the uncertainty of his whims,” Iason replied, his voice now more stern. “You’ll mind me on this, Riki. Is that understood?”

Riki refused to answer, looking away.

Now Iason took hold of his chin, turning his head back to face him. “Is that understood, pet?” he demanded.

“Yes. Yes, it’s fucking understood.” Bitter that he now had to hide his part in Kei’s death, Riki pouted. It went against his entire upbringing, and he resented Iason’s interference in the matter.

Iason studied him for a moment. "If you were so inclined to announce the killing, then why did you dispose of the body in the ocean?"

Riki shrugged.

Iason narrowed his eyes, displeased with Riki's sudden evasiveness. "Answer me, pet."

Riki sighed dramatically.

"Pet," the Blondie scolded.

"Because," he whispered, "because...I was...afraid of the body. Okay? Are you happy now?"

Unable to suppress a smile at this confession, the Blondie leaned down impulsively and kissed Riki on the forehead. "Oh pet. You...surprise me sometimes."

"Yeah well. You wouldn't understand what it's like to have a dead man staring up at you. And Dana Burn was...creepy," the mongrel replied with unveiled petulance.

He was annoyed that he had been forced to confess his fear, feeling it was absurd to be so affected the dead. But he had always been so, since a mere boy, though he had been careful to conceal his phobia from others, particularly from Bison. It was something that had its inception in his earliest memories, from the day he had found his father, clearly dead, in his bed, and the man had suddenly opened his eyes. It was merely a muscular contraction caused by the onset of rigor mortis, Riki knew now, but at the time the incident had shaken him to the core.

"Then...you killed this mongrel...because he threatened you? And not for any other reason?"

"He had a name, you know," Riki snapped, offended at Iason's referring to Kei as this mongrel.

"Very well. You killed...Kei...to protect yourself? Not because you were jealous?"

"I wasn't jealous. He was a total dickhead, though."

The Blondie smiled at this.

"I don't see what's so amusing. I just told you I killed someone."

“Don’t take that tone with me,” Iason warned, though this voice suggested no real threat.

“What are you smiling about? Kei’s dead and you look almost happy about it.”

“I am not happy,” Iason replied. “But I must admit I am a bit relieved, on a number of counts. And fortunately he was only a mongrel.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Riki shot back, angrily. “Are you saying his life doesn’t count for anything because he’s a mongrel?”

“You misunderstand me, pet. I merely mean that, as a mongrel, his death entails no further legal complications. If he had been a citizen or an Elite, it would have been a very different matter.”

“I guess that’s because we mongrels are just worthless vulgar trash,” Riki retorted, bitterly.

“Now, Riki,” Iason chided. “You know that’s not how I think of you.”

“But that’s what you think of other mongrels, isn’t it? Admit it!”

The Blondie thought for a moment, trying to decide how to answer. He did not want to hurt his pet, but it was hard to feel anything but contempt for mongrels. His entire upbringing and training at the Academy had drilled such attitudes into him, not easily discarded. Although he had come to develop a certain respect for Riki, those feelings did not extend generally to the population of non-citizens that inhabited Ceres. Slum-rats were filthy, amoral inebriates that weren’t even worth a second thought. He’d even felt such contempt for his own pet initially...at least until he had beheld Riki’s naked body.

“You don’t have to say anything. I can see it in your eyes,” Riki muttered.

“I’ll concede I probably feel the same contempt for mongrels generally that you feel for Elites,” Iason replied, finally. “Of course, my feelings for you are quite different.”

Riki couldn't help but smile at his master's reply, finding it clever. "I suppose I can't deny that I don't hold a high opinion of Elites."

Iason smiled. "And what about me, Riki? What opinion do you hold of me?"

"You already know that."

"Tell me again."

The mongrel sighed. "Dumbass. I've already told you a thousand times. I...care for you."

"Care for me? Is that all?"

"That's all I feel like saying right now."

"Tell me you love me," Iason demanded.

"If you make me tell you, how do you know I really mean it?"

Now Iason fell silent. "Don't you love me, pet?" he asked, finally, a bit hurt by Riki's rebuff.

Riki sighed dramatically and loudly. "You're such a big ox. Blockhead! All right. Yes, I love you. Satisfied?"

"Yes," Iason answered, smiling, happy with his pet's confession and amused by the manner in which he reluctantly tendered it.

"What...what is my punishment?" Riki asked, nervously.

"Your...punishment?"

"For...for what I did. For killing Kei."

"Your own thoughts will be punishment enough," the Blondie answered, knowingly.

Riki was stunned. He'd simply assumed he'd be in for some sort of monstrous discipline session for his transgression. He'd been severely punished for far less. Somehow he felt he deserved a formal punishment, for his own peace of mind. At the same time, of course, he'd dreaded telling Iason for precisely that reason, knowing full well what sort of torture the Blondie could dream up.

"What is it, Riki? You look upset."

"It doesn't seem right. I should be...punished for what I did."

Now the Blondie smiled. "Are you saying you want to be punished, Riki?"

“No,” the mongrel replied quickly. “Not that I want it. It just seems like...for what I did...I thought you’d react a lot differently.”

Iason thought about this for a moment. “When I punish you, Riki, it is because you do not obey me. This...what happened with this mongrel....Kei,” he corrected, quickly, “had nothing to do with me. I’ve already punished you for running away.”

“But...won’t this cause you...some sort of trouble?”

Now Iason looked at his pet with pity, considering how to tell him the truth of the matter without upsetting him. “No. Kei was a mongrel. I know you don’t want to hear this, but, as a non-citizen, his death is of no consequence. I mean as far as the law is concerned, or Jupiter.”

“Oh.” Hurt by this revelation, Riki fell silent. Kei’s death was of no consequence. It seemed, to him, cruelly unjust. He could not help but think about how Guy would react once he knew the truth. Kei’s death would certainly be of some consequence to him, at least. He was hurt not only by this complete lack of legal recognition for the value of a mongrel life--something which he should have guessed, but had never been directly confronted with--and also by Iason’s impassivity. The Blondie seemed completely unaffected by his confession, infuriatingly indifferent to Kei’s death.

“Are you all right?” Iason asked, gently, concerned by his pet’s vacant expression.

“I’ve got a headache,” Riki whispered. “And...my chest hurts. I feel like I can’t breathe right.”

“The medics should be here soon. Until then you should rest. And drink plenty of fluids--I’ll have Toma bring you something.”

“Melon juice,” the mongrel pleaded. “Nice and cold. With lots of ice.”

“As you wish.” Iason rose, feeling extraordinarily relieved by their conversation. He was, in all honesty, glad that his pet had confessed to murder rather than his harboring some secret affection for his old pairing partner. And, in truth, Kei’s death proved convenient for him personally, bringing closure to the matter of his

challenge to Katze's--and thus ultimately his own--authority as the leader of the black market.

Now relieved of his worries that had occupied his thoughts since the previous day, Iason was anxious to tend to the thousand pressing matters that called for his attention. He had the trade convention to deal with, the Commander's visit to prepare for, Aki's party to consider, and now, most infuriatingly, Jupiter to contend with.

"I'm going in to the Syndicate," he said, tugging his glove back on. "I'll be back later this evening."

Riki nodded, suddenly feeling extraordinarily sleepy.

"Stay in bed and rest, pet."

"Yeah." The mongrel sighed, feeling marginally better for having told someone what he'd done. It wasn't the same as a formal public announcement, which slum code dictated, but at least it attenuated the weight on his heart.

Still, he could not help but feel despondent over learning that a mongrel's life counted for nothing in the eyes of the Elite. Although he had felt strangely out of place upon his return to the slums of Midas, in this respect he would always be a mongrel at heart. As much as he had disliked Kei, he certainly believed his life had value. It was worth something, and Riki had taken it away. The fact that Iason was not punishing him for it was strangely disheartening as well as bewildering. Though during his whipping at Dana Burn Riki had imagined he was secretly being punished for killing Kei, to learn that he would receive no further censure for his offense--no formal punishment of any kind--was oddly disturbing.

Riki would have no sense of closure for his transgression, no feeling that he had paid for his crime. For in the eyes of Jupiter, what he had done was not even a crime.

The world he lived in was an unjust one. Although he had always known this, now Riki truly understood what it meant to be a mongrel. To be someone of no consequence.

“You’re awake.”

As he drifted back into awareness, Yui became aware of the Raoul’s presence, and his master’s cool hand brushing the hair back from his face.

“Is it over?”

“Yes. Heiku says everything went well.”

“Oh,” Yui groaned, suddenly aware of the horrific pain between his legs.

“Does it hurt?”

“A little,” he winced.

“Nurse,” Raoul bellowed.

The nurse, Mika, came rushing in.

“He’s in pain,” Raoul announced, almost accusingly.

“We couldn’t give him anything until he regained consciousness,” she replied, a little defensively.

“Give him something now, then.”

The nurse nodded, feeling a bit put off by the Blondie’s domineering manner. But then, he was a Blondie. And an infamously moody one at that. Blondies were always difficult to deal with at the hospital, since they were accustomed to being in control. But a hospital was a place where they had very little control.

She activated Yui’s implanted dispenser with a remote control. It would administer analgesics on a regular basis, which would help tremendously with the pain, though it would do little to help once Yui began Acceleration. His first treatment was scheduled later that day, and Mika desperately hoped the great Blondie would go home before that happened. She had a feeling Raoul would be more difficult to deal with than the patient.

Privately she found the whole situation very odd--the Blondie having his Furniture undergo reconstruction. She didn’t understand it, but then she knew better than to ask questions.

Moaning slightly, Yui smiled, his eyes half-closed. The pain mediation worked immediately, not only ameliorating his pain, but making him feel good all over.

“Feeling better?” she asked, smiling knowingly.

Yui nodded. “Much.”

“Leave us,” Raoul said, brusquely.

Mika gave him a slight bow as she left, biting her tongue and desperately wishing she was in a position to censure him for his rudeness. But she was not; he was a Blondie, and in the social ladder she was positioned well beneath him.

“How long have I been asleep? Since the surgery?”

“Don’t you remember waking up yesterday?”

“No,” Yui answered, puzzled. “I don’t remember anything. Then the surgery...was yesterday?”

“Yes. You’ve been drifting in and out of consciousness since then.”

Now Yui, more fully awake, was suddenly anxious to see his new body. He lifted the sheet, peering under it. “I see a bulge,” he announced, excited.

“Let me see.” Raoul took the sheet and simply pulled it down so that Yui’s body was on full display. He lifted Yui’s night shirt to examine the bandaged area.

“When can we take the bandage off?” Yui asked.

“Whenever the doctor says. Probably the nurse will change it later. But...you may not like what you see.”

“Why not?”

“Because...it will take awhile before you’re fully healed.”

“Did you remember to feed Pixie?”

“Pixie?” Raoul blinked.

“The kitty!”

“Oh. I haven’t...been home.”

“You mean you’ve been here since yesterday?” Yui was stunned that his Master had stayed by him all night.

“Yes. I wanted...to be sure you were all right.” Raoul smiled.

“You have to go home and feed him,” Yui pleaded. “He’ll go crazy. He’s probably torn the place apart.”

“If he did, I’ll punish him,” Raoul replied, grumpily.

“No! Don’t punish him. He’s just a sweet little kitty who’s all hungry and mad.”

“Very well. Then I’ll punish you. When you’re healed.”

Yui giggled at this threat, thrilled with the glimmer in his master’s eyes. He knew that future “punishment” could be a lot more interesting once he was functioning properly.

“You won’t find it so amusing when I have you over my knee,” Raoul warned, but he was unable to suppress a smile. He couldn’t wait to get Yui home again, and was anxious for the day when he could explore him more fully. Most of all, he was looking forward to hearing Yui climax for the first time.

“Please. Go home and feed him. And don’t tell me you’ve been up all night?”

Raoul leaned forward, feigning a stern expression. “Are you telling me what to do, Yui?”

“No, Master,” Yui answered, quickly, then smiled as he realized his master was only teasing.

“I will go home later today. After your first treatment. I want to be with you.”

Yui was so happy, he didn’t even care about the Acceleration treatment that was coming. He was flattered that his master had stayed at the hospital the entire night. “You must be tired.”

Raoul shrugged. “Perhaps a bit.” He pulled the sheet back up to cover Yui and then reached out and took hold of his hand.

“Thank you...for all this.” Yui’s voice wavered a bit as he blinked back tears of gratitude.

Now Raoul leaned forward to whisper in his ear. “We’ll see if you’re still so thankful when I ravish you night after night.”

“But you do that anyway,” Yui shot back, teasingly.

“Naughty pet. Don’t get cheeky with me.”

Pet? Yui blinked again, opening and closing his mouth as he struggled to find his voice.

“You...you...Master, you just called me...pet.”

Raoul smiled. “That’s because you’ve become my pet, even if it’s just our little secret. My very special secret pet.”

Yui had always fantasized about what it would be like to be a pet. To be his master's pampered plaything, performing for him on command. Even if he was only a "secret pet," he was thrilled that his master thought of him as such.

"You look rather pleased," Raoul remarked. "Do you like it when I call you pet?"

Yui nodded, too emotional to reply.

"I'm not just toying with you. When we return home and you're well, I want you to perform for me like a pet."

"Will I wear special clothes?" Yui whispered back, excited.

Raoul laughed. "At times." He stared down fondly at Yui, wondering what went on inside his head. "What do you think of that?"

"I've always wondered what it would be like...to be a pet. To wear such...revealing clothing. And chains. Will I wear a collar?"

"Does that excite you?" Raoul whispered. "Then...I'll chain you up in the hall."

"Like Master Iason's wild mongrel," Yui whispered back, smiling.

"Precisely. Only you won't be as naughty as that. Or if you are...I'll really have to punish you."

Thrilled with his master's playfulness, Yui gazed up at him coyly. "What will you do to me?"

"I'll tie you facedown to the bed, spread-eagled. And then...I'll take my belt off and discipline you with it. After that I'll straddle you and take you repeatedly." Raoul paused, finding the conversation exceptionally arousing. He reached down to adjust himself, drawing Yui's notice.

"Are you becoming aroused, Master?"

"Yes, my Yui-pet. You've quite stimulated me. I shall have to relieve myself when I go down to the car, before I drive home."

"I can do that now," Yui offered.

"No," Raoul replied, though a bit hesitantly. "No...you're recovering."

“I want to. I can relieve you with my hand. Close the door, Master.”

Raoul studied him for a moment, a small, quivering smile tugging at his lips. “Very well,” he whispered. “If you're quite sure.”

Yui nodded. “I am. I want to...thank you.”

The Blondie then quickly rose and closed the door to the room, his cock growing increasingly rigid at the mere thought of Yui's proposition. As he returned to the bed, his fingers trembled a bit as he unzipped his trousers. He released his erection, sucking in his breath a little when Yui immediately took him in his hand, his warm fingers encircling his ready shaft. He found that he was exceptionally aroused, having skipped his usual evening and morning routines, so that the boy's mere touch nearly made him spill his seed.

“Yui,” he whispered. “You're a good pet.”

Yui smiled broadly at this, thrilled with his master's new appellation. He slowly stroked the twitching organ, enjoying the Blondie's small gasps and the look of sheer pleasure on his face.

“Does that feel good?”

“Oh yes. I won't last long this time.”

“Then move closer. Let me roll onto my side and you can climax into my mouth.”

Raoul hesitated. “Well...if you're sure....”

Yui smiled. “I'm sure.”

The boy's offer sent Raoul spiraling close to the precipice, and when Yui moved onto his side, looking up at him expectantly, he groaned.

“I'm going to come, Yui. Just press me up to your lips and drink me.”

Before Yui could really respond, the Blondie erupted, shooting semen onto the boy's lips and chin.

“Yes. Yes, pet,” Raoul whispered, overcome with pleasure. “You're...magnificent.”

Having released fully, the Blondie then quickly cleaned himself up, wiping off Yui's face with a small cloth that was on the table

next to the bed. He held it up, smiling. "She'll wonder a bit about this if she catches the scent," he smiled, referring to the nurse, then shoved the cloth into his pocket. "Thank you, Yui. I...needed that."

Yui rolled onto his back, pleased. "Was it good?"

"Oh yes. It always is."

Yui yawned, the medication now starting to make him drowsy.

"You should rest. I shouldn't have exerted you," Raoul remarked, concerned.

Yui shook his head. "I wanted to. Why don't you go home now and feed Pixie while I take a nap? And maybe you should take a nap."

Raoul nodded. Whether it was having just released or merely his body catching up with him, he suddenly felt exhausted. "I'll go home for a bit. Then I'll come back later, before your treatment."

He leaned down, kissing Yui's forehead. "You sleep now."

"Yes, Master," Yui replied, his eyes fluttering shut. He drifted off to sleep almost instantly, a smile still on his lips.

* * *

"I can't hear anything," Odi announced, after everyone had strained for a few minutes to hear the conversation between Iason and his pet.

"I wonder what he meant? About the pendant," Toma asked, thoughtfully.

Tai shook his head. "That's the first I've heard of it."

"Shit." Katze's ass was now starting to burn, and he dreaded the night that was ahead. Additionally, he wanted Accelerator applied, though he wasn't sure to ask. He turned to Tai.

"I don't suppose you'd help me apply some Accelerator, Tai?"

"I'll help," Toma volunteered, eagerly.

Katze nodded, putting aside his feelings of embarrassment. Toma had already seen him in nearly the most humiliating situation possible, so there was no reason to reject his offer. "All right. Let's go to my room."

“I'll get the Accelerator,” Tai offered, rushing to retrieve it.

Now Katze turned to Toma. “I'm rather mortified that you had to witness this, Toma, on your first day here. But it's probably a good lesson for you. You should know that Iason is uncompromising when it comes to how his household is run. If you displease him, you'll most certainly find yourself under his arm.”

Toma nodded, his gaze resting momentarily on the long, ragged scar that marred his otherwise exceptionally handsome face. He knew, as everyone did, that Katze had received the scar when Master Iason found him hacking into the Eos database. It was at that time that he had moved Katze to his underground operations in Midas--an interesting decision. Most masters would not have utilized the skills of their Furniture. Katze would have been merely been punished, and probably sent away, had he been the servant of anyone else. But Iason Mink was like no other master on Amoi.

Katze noticed his glance and nodded. “Yes.” He pointed to his face. “His punishments can be quite...harsh.” Now he lowered his voice a bit as they began walking towards his room. “I'm telling you this for your own good. I know you have an...inclination for gossip. Be careful, Toma. Iason doesn't generally care about gossip and such, unless you...step over the line. Do you get my meaning?”

Toma nodded. “You mean regarding Riki.”

“Yes. But not just that. That's hardly a secret, as you know. The most important thing is that you always obey him, in whatever he asks you to do. And that you not...how shall I put this? Betray him, in any way. He's very particular that his household must be loyal. Especially when it concerns any sort of matter that might...reach Jupiter.”

“I understand,” Toma whispered, excited. He was thrilled to be part of anything that demanded his “loyalty.” To Toma, this screamed of intrigue, and he couldn't wait to ferret out all the details. “So is it true what Odi said, that Commander Voshka will be staying here next week?”

Katze nodded. “And that's a secret. Make no mistake there. Breathe a word of that to anyone outside this household and you'll

be locked up in the T-stand for a week. In fact, I'll personally kick your ass." Although Katze was exaggerating, he knew there was no question that Iason would be most displeased if news of the Commander's plans were leaked.

"Won't they need like...an army or something? For protection?"

"They're working out all the details. I think Iason's speaking with Jupiter."

"Yes," Toma replied, without thinking. "He's going to talk to Jupiter this afternoon." Suddenly realizing his error, he grew pale, staring at Katze with wide eyes.

Katze smiled at his mortification. "That's just what I'm talking about. You need to be very careful what you say, Toma. You'll have to learn to think before you speak. I'm not sure what happened to make you look so frightened, but my guess is Iason has already given you a warning of some kind, not to tell anyone he was going to see Jupiter."

Toma stared back, uncertain if he should acknowledge the truth in this statement. He choose to remain silent, keeping his face neutral.

Katze laughed. "Very good. You're learning already. Although...we keep no secrets among ourselves. We speak freely to one another in the household concerning all matters. I only mean that, with regard to anyone outside this household--Sarius or Ru, for example," he remarked, giving Toma a pointed look, "you must never speak of what goes on." Now Katze pulled back his tunic, to reveal the taming stick he always carried now. "And just so you know, I have authority to discipline anyone in this household. I won't hesitate to discipline you, if I suspect you've disregarded what I just told you."

Toma eyed the stick, a bit surprised.

"Do we understand one another?"

"Yes, Katze."

"Good."

"Here's the Accelerator," Tai whispered, tossing Toma the can. Toma attempted to catch it but fumbled, the can rolling across the floor. "Shit."

Tai and Katze both laughed at this. "You've got to be quicker than that around here," he teased.

"I'm not used to...catching things," Toma replied, then realized the stupidity of his remark.

Katze shook his head. "You're funny. All right. Let's get this over with."

As Toma followed him into his bedroom, Tai was suddenly startled by Odi, who had come up behind him and now put his arms around him, pressing his body against him. He slid a hand under his shirt and up his chest, tweaking his nipple as he kissed his neck.

Tai gasped, closing his eyes.

"Come to my bed again tonight," Odi whispered, urgently. "Please."

"Oh! All....all right," Tai answered.

Odi smiled, thrilled. He was quite anxious for another night with Tai in his bed, and this time he was making no promises. He just might have to take things to the next level. He'd woken up the previous night and, finding Tai in his bed, naked, warm, and fast asleep, it had been all he could do to keep from ravishing him. In the end he relieved himself with his hand, stimulated by the sight of the beautiful boy sprawled so vulnerably next to him.

Tonight he was going to take Tai--assuming he did not resist...or at least not overly much. And he had an idea of how to achieve his acquiescence. "How about you fuck me tonight?" he whispered.

His heart pounding hard in his chest, Tai swallowed. He could feel Odi's erection hardening against his ass as the bodyguard pulled him closer, thrusting ever so slightly against him. "I...don't know."

"You'll love it. Trust me."

Tai was most definitely tempted. He'd always wondered...what it would be like. Although he was still rather reluctant to be

penetrated, the thought of being the initiator--of his cock sliding deep into Odi's ass--was extremely provocative. He loved that Odi was willing to give himself to him first. He shuddered, delighted with the thought.

"Yes. You'll be shivering tonight," Odi continued. "It's time you learned the meaning of true pleasure."

Tai started to speak and Odi slipped a hand over his mouth. "Hush. Don't speak. Just think about it. We don't have to do anything you don't want. But at least give it some thought." Now becoming extremely aroused at his body so close to Tai's, Odi began kissing his neck more insistently.

The combination of his undeniable excitement and the bodyguard's strong hand pressed over his mouth was immensely provocative to the Aristian. He gasped, closing his eyes and letting his head fall back against Odi's chest.

"I'd love to take you, just like this," Odi commented, nibbling on his ear. "From behind, holding you captive." He slid one hand down his abdomen and into Tai's pants, much to the boy's surprise. Finding Tai completely erect, he groaned. "You're so ready for me. Let's...go to my room now, Tai."

"But I...have to make lunch," he protested, his voice muffled by Odi's hand.

Odi let his hand fall away. "It can wait. Just for a few minutes. I'm about ready to burst and so are you. Let's suck each other off."

"I don't know," Tai began, biting his lip.

"Come on, Tai. You know you want to. I'll show you...a special position."

"Well..."

Now Odi began pushing him toward his room insistently. "I won't take no for an answer. It won't take long."

"A...special position?" Tai repeated, his voice a hushed whisper.

"Yes. We can pleasure each other at the same time."

"But how can we do that?" Tai protested.

"I'll show you."

They had reached Odi's room, and the bodyguard suddenly lifted him up, carrying him inside and then to the bedroom, where he tossed him roughly on the bed. "Get undressed," commanded, pulling off his shirt.

Thrilled at Odi's manner, Tai smiled, obeying. Once they were both naked, Odi slid on top of him, kissing him hungrily. "Your body is so warm," he moaned, desperate to turn him over and sink his shaft into him, to take him without restraint. He managed to resist the urge, though his cock was twitching wildly.

Suddenly they both startled upon hearing a scream.

Odi smiled. "Katze."

"Oh." Tai relaxed, and they continued to kiss for a few more moments.

"All right. Now I'm going to turn around and start pleasuring you. I'll be straddling you, so you can lick me. You don't have to do much--I'm about ready to climax. Okay?"

Tai nodded, now understanding what Odi had meant by a "special position." The bodyguard flipped around, head down, and straddled Tai, then began pleasuring him with his tongue.

Tai moaned, almost immediately releasing. Confronted with Odi's massive erection bumping up against his face, he reached up and took hold of him, sucking tentatively on the tip.

Odi moaned, the vibration producing a wildly erotic sensation on Tai's aching cock. He moaned, in return, sending shivers down Odi's back. Odi spread his legs a bit more to press himself closer to Tai's mouth, repositioning himself a bit so that the boy would lick his testicles, something the bodyguard particularly enjoyed.

The sensation of Odi's hot, wet mouth enveloping him was almost too much for Tai. He instinctively began thrusting into the bodyguard's mouth, anxious for release. Odi, thrilled with his eagerness, repositioned himself again, now longing to sink into Tai's mouth. He wiggled around until he found that wet portal, then proceeded to fuck him gently in the mouth with quick, purposeful strokes, savoring Tai's submission and the sweet enthusiasm of his tongue.

Thus it was not long before the two lovers reached completion, both of them beside themselves with pleasure, and both coming nearly simultaneously, Tai first, and Odi right on his heels. Afterwards, they held each other for some moments.

"That was incredible," Odi said, finally. "We'll have to do that again."

"Yes," Tai agreed. "It was very...erotic."

"So...you enjoyed it?"

"Yes," Tai admitted. "But it was a little...distracting...I mean, it was hard to concentrate on pleasuring you when what you were doing felt so good."

"You pleased me perfectly," Odi answered, pulling him close. "Although I knew it wouldn't take much. But I know what you mean. We won't do that all the time--just when the moment seems right."

"I liked it," Tai decided. "But I wasn't sure what I was supposed to do."

"Do you mean when I lowered myself?"

Tai nodded. "Yes. Because then I couldn't...reach you. So I just...licked what was in front of me."

"That's exactly where I wanted you to lick," Odi whispered. "And you did it just the way I like it."

"Really?"

"Yes. And next time...maybe you could take me into your mouth. I like that...if you're careful."

"Oh." Tai thought about this for a moment. "You have to tell me these things. Because I don't know what I'm doing."

"I love that about you." Odi nuzzled his neck, smiling. "You're so....innocent. It's very sweet. And I know I'm corrupting you."

"Yes, you are," Tai agreed. "My father would be quite shocked, if he could see me." Although Tai said this jokingly, he realized with a small shudder that it was true. He hated to think what his father would do...and as he considered this, a horrible thought occurred to him.

What would he do when his year of penance was over? His father would be expecting him to return to Aristia and become a

priest. But Tai already knew there was no way he could enter the priesthood now. He loved sex too much. And he planned to give himself entirely to Odi...soon. But not only that.

He didn't want to return to Aristia. Not now.

"Is something wrong?" Odi asked, concerned.

"No. I was only thinking about...my father."

"I see. I suppose I should let you get back to the kitchen." Now Odi rolled on top of him, giving him a long, loving kiss. "So. Will you come to my bed again tonight?"

"All right."

Odi smiled at this. "Good. Although I should probably warn you," he began, then hesitated, unsure if he wanted to give Tai a chance to back out.

"Warn me about what?"

The bodyguard stared down at him, suddenly serious. "I meant what I said earlier. That you could fuck me. But...I must confess, Tai, that I was really hoping tonight...you'd let me take you, too."

Tai stared back, his heart beating faster again. He'd been expecting this, and he wasn't sure why he was so nervous. But the thought of the night ahead gave him chills.

A little disappointed with Tai's silence, Odi bent down and kissed him on the forehead. "But we don't have to. Just think about it."

"I will."

Satisfied with this, they both rose and dressed, and returned to the great hall. As they emerged from Odi's room, Toma was just heading towards his room and, understanding immediately what had just gone on between them, he looked away, jealous.

So. Odi was already spoken for. By Tai. He found he was rather disappointed with this revelation, although he wasn't really sure why. After all, from what he could discern, both Odi and Tai were intact. He'd been foolish to imagine the bodyguard could ever be attracted to him when he wasn't even equipped to return his affections.

No one would ever be attracted to him. He was nothing, a mere Furniture whose only function was to serve his master and watch over his master's pets. He went into his room, leaning against the door for a moment as he tried to clear his mind of such thoughts.

As much as Toma loved to gossip, he was, in fact, rather prone to sudden mood swings and spells of depression. He took great interest in the lives of others, mostly because his own life was so uneventful. The animated face he put on in the company of Sarius and Ru, among others, masked his true feelings and the emptiness of his own heart.

A heart that had never known love.

* * *

For some moments, Iason remained in his vehicle outside the Syndicate, fondling himself. He was trying to work himself into a state of arousal that would make it easier for him to deal with Jupiter.

He'd decided that Jupiter's suspicions were too grave to take lightly. He was going to have to take... drastic measures.

And he knew exactly what to do. If his hunch was right, he could deceive Jupiter completely.

Though he usually drank several glasses of wine before entering her sanctum, this time he only poured himself one, waiting to enter her chambers before even taking a sip. He didn't want the alcohol to affect his ability to proceed with what he had in mind.

"Thank you for coming so quickly," Jupiter greeted him, pleased.

Iason replied to that with a low bow, deliberately holding the position for a long moment to show his deference.

Jupiter watched him, delighted. Their meeting was off to an auspicious start. It was immediately apparent that Iason was going to affirm his allegiance; something that she had, for the most part, expected, although she had been a little worried.

Now, the way Iason sat down in his chair, gazing at her seductively over his wine glass was simply charming.

"You seem to be in a good mood," she remarked, curious.

Iason laughed softly. "I've decided that I'm going to be honest with you. I don't think I should hide my true feelings anymore. Especially since, for some reason, you've come to doubt me. So...I want you to know exactly where I stand. But first, might I ask why you've called me here? What made you question my allegiance?"

Jupiter studied his body language, the flirtatious glimmer in his eyes, and noted the unmistakable bulge between the Blondie's legs. Iason was sexually aroused. Fascinated, she waited, curious as to what her golden boy would say next.

"There is nothing specific," she replied. "But lately you seem...distant."

"Ah." Iason nodded, as if understanding. "I was afraid of that. So. It's time to tell you."

"Then, tell me, Iason. Tell me where you stand."

Iason paused for a moment before replying, lowering his eyes to strengthen his resolve. He looked up, his gaze conveying his meaning. "I'm surprised you even have to ask. I would have thought it would be quite obvious. In fact, I harbor feelings for you that are...quite inappropriate. And somehow you've mistaken my...distance...for a treachery of some kind. When in fact nothing could be further from the truth."

Stunned by this revelation, Jupiter made no reply, trying to evaluate the veracity of the Blondie's assertions. But the sentient computer was deficient in her ability to detect deception; all the data she gathered from Iason's voice, his expression, his body cues, told her that he spoke the truth. She was simply unable to perceive that the Blondie was playing her.

"What sort of feelings?" she asked, finally. "Elaborate."

"Surely you know."

"I'm uncertain. I'm picking up signals from you that...suggest you have sexual feelings for me."

“Yes,” Iason whispered. “Exactly so. And I wouldn’t want to offend you with my...perversions.” He bowed his head, as if ashamed.

Now Jupiter could wait no longer. She changed form, moving across the room to rematerialize before her beloved Iason, taking his face into her holographic hands. Though when they touched, it was merely an exchange of energy, she nevertheless wanted to convey her affection for him.

“Do not be ashamed. I am...quite flattered that you harbor such feelings for me. But I would never have guessed it.”

Now Iason raised his eyes to look at her directly. “Will you forgive me for my perversions?”

Jupiter paused for a moment before replying. “I do not think of this as a perversion, Iason. A bit aberrant, perhaps, but you’ve always been a deviant. Nevertheless, I’ve told you, you’re my favorite, of all the Syndicate Heads that have served me.”

In fact, Jupiter was thrilled that Iason had made such a delightful admission, for she was fascinated with his sexuality. It was a part of him she did not truly understand, though she longed to.

“You’re...most gracious.”

Jupiter studied him again, now quite aware that his arousal was genuine. “You’re aroused now. Isn’t that right?”

“Yes.” Iason’s voice, barely a whisper, carried a hint of sadness. “Please forgive me. I have... nefarious desires.”

“I confess that I find you quite fascinating, Iason. And I would not mind--in fact, I would quite welcome--a demonstration of...these desires.”

Iason’s eyes widened with surprise. “What do you mean?”

“I would like to watch you, Iason.”

The Blondie, thrilled with how beautifully his grand deception was proceeding, now quickly pressed thoughts of his pet into his mind to ensure the success of his design. He imagined Riki loving him in the shower, looking up at him and telling him that he loved him as he flicked his tongue wickedly along the head of his cock.

“You mean...right now?” he whispered.

“Yes.”

“Then....” The Blondie quickly unzipped himself, as though eager to take advantage of her offer before she retracted it.

He was fully erect, and Jupiter gazed at him in amazement as the Blondie slipped off a glove and began stroking himself. Iason closed his eyes, allowing his head to rest against the back of his chair as he spread his legs, his thoughts bent on taking his pet. With this focused discipline, he was able to bring himself to orgasm within a few minutes.

Jupiter was mesmerized, watching--with complete amazement--Iason's straining, pleased expression and the thick white semen that finally shot up from his organ.

Completely convinced of Iason's sincerity, she returned to her platform, pleased.

“Do you still need an affirmation of my allegiance?” Iason asked, quietly.

“No, Iason. You have quite persuaded me. You may go.”

Zippering himself back up, Iason then bowed again before leaving her chambers, hiding a victorious smile that threatened to expose his art.

Seduction and Deceit

Iason sat in his favorite chair by the immense, arched window, gazing out at Tanagura as darkness descended on the city. Both moons were rising in luminous gold, brilliant against the star-ravished sky.

His thoughts flitted from one subject to another, as though propelled by an inner force that would not allow him to rest until every worry had been visited, and then revisited, time and again.

He wondered about Voshka Khosi's visit, trying to decide how he would meet the Commander's advances, for he was convinced Khosi intended to seduce him. This was a peripheral concern; the core of his anxiety regarding Khosi was, of course, his relation to Anori. The two were completely entangled in his thoughts and emotions, and he worried that somehow Khosi would ferret out his guilt, that through some fraternal intuition he would discover the truth of what Iason had done. He could not even allow himself to consider the consequences if this should happen; it would no doubt be disastrous, not only for him but also for Amoi.

Although he felt Jupiter had been temporarily appeased by his performance in her sanctum, he still felt decidedly uneasy about her accusation. It was only a matter of time before he was summoned once again. He was worried, too, about her ultimatum, that Riki could only remain his pet for one year. Perhaps he could persuade Jupiter to discard this restriction; but what if he could not?

He would never give up Riki. Even if it meant bringing Jupiter down. And he was not alone in his weariness of Jupiter's laws and restrictions; he felt certain he had allies, should he pursue the plan

architected in Yousi's logs. Omaki had already given him his support. Xian owed him a debt, as did Raoul.

And Raoul...Iason shook his head slightly, unable to believe that his old lover had convinced Heiku to restore Yui. Both Raoul and Heiku were taking tremendous risks in collaborating to accomplish an unsanctioned modification.

He was so deep in thought he did not hear Riki coming to him, until he was startled by Toma and Tai, who were laughing at Riki's choice of evening wear.

Turning, he saw his pet approaching him, completely naked.

"Riki," he scolded, but could not help but smile at the sight of the beautiful mongrel, hair wildly unkempt, eyes half closed with sleepiness, walking toward him.

Without a single word, Riki crawled onto his lap, leaning against his chest and snuggling up to the warm Blondie. He had been coughing for hours, and now, though the coughing had finally abated, he was feeling extraordinarily weary. "I need love," he whispered, his voice scratchy and weak.

Iason smiled, wrapping his arms around him. "My pet needs love. Then, I shall have to love you," he replied. "Your cough has gotten better, I think. And you're stronger now. You could hardly stand up earlier."

"Mmn."

"I'll give you another patch in about an hour. Until then if you sit up, you'll probably feel even better."

Riki sighed at this, wishing he could sleep. "Will you just hold me for awhile, then?"

"Of course, my love. Although, if you continue to sit naked on my lap, there will be...certain consequences."

In fact, Iason was already aroused, the mongrel's warm, naked body predictably triggering an instinctive response.

"So? Just jerk off on me again."

Laughing, Iason kissed the top of Riki's head. He pulled him close, suddenly seized with an overwhelming feeling of love for his pet.

“Iason?”

“Yes, love?”

“What do you think happens...after we die?”

Iason paused for a moment, a bit surprised by the question.

“Are you thinking of the...of Kei?”

“Yeah,” Riki admitted. “Where do you think he is?”

“He is not anywhere, pet, but his body is probably still in the ocean.”

“So you mean...you don't believe anything happens? After we die?”

“Are you sure you want to hear my view?”

“Yes. Tell me.”

“Then, it is my belief that once the body has decomposed, nothing remains of a person. There is nothing beyond this life, no gods to intervene, no realms to wander in, no reward or punishment, no enlightenment or paradise. There is only one life, and one final death.”

Riki was silent for a moment. Although he was not surprised by Iason's view, he had rather hoped for a more encouraging vision. “Katze believes that after he dies, Astrajia will take him into the twenty-first dimension.”

Iason smiled. “Yes, I am familiar with Katze's beliefs.”

“And Tai--he worships Armah. He says that after death, we all get sucked back into Armah, or something like that.”

“My views are more aligned with that perspective. If you replace the name *Armah* with energy, that is very close to what I believe.”

“But...he believes Armah is more than just energy.”

“He is free to believe whatever he likes.”

“So you think it's all bullshit?”

“I think such...beliefs are necessary for those persons who are unable to accept the coldness of truth.”

“Don't you want to know what I believe?” Riki asked, after a moment.

“Yes, pet. Tell me.”

"I think...everything--life, death--is very mysterious. And that there is no way to know what the truth is. And that...Katze could be right. Or maybe Tai is right. Or maybe even you. There might even be demons out there...or ghosts."

At this, Iason laughed. "Don't tell me you believe in ghosts, pet?"

"No," Riki shot back, a little too quickly, his nerves still shot from his night at Dana Burn.

"I should hope not. You're too smart to believe in such foolishness."

"But how do you know there aren't ghosts?"

"Because after the body decomposes, there is nothing left to constitute the apparition."

"But you don't know that! Maybe ghosts are...energy residuals."

Iason smiled, finding this argument rather clever.

"Master Iason," Toma interrupted, "I'm sorry to disturb you, but there's an incoming for you. From Commander Khosi."

"Bloody hell," Riki groaned, as he relinquished his comfortable place on Iason's lap. "When is he coming anyway?"

"I'm sure that's what he wants to discuss. I'm sorry, pet. I'll only be a moment."

Iason rose and went to the terminus. He flipped the monitor on for full visual.

Voshka smiled as soon as he saw him. "Ah. Iason. Forgive me for disturbing you. But I wanted to confirm our arrangements."

"It is no inconvenience whatsoever, Commander. We are all looking forward to your arrival."

"We?" Voshka smiled. "And what about you, Iason? Are you looking forward to my arrival?"

"Of course. And do you have an idea about when that might be?"

"Tomorrow. Will that be acceptable?"

Although Iason was rather alarmed, his expression did not betray his inner panic. "What time?"

"Evening. After sunset."

“Will you have dinner with us?”

“Dinner would be most excellent.” Now Voshka leaned forward, a naughty smile tugging at his lips. “And perhaps a bit of dessert, just you and I?”

Choosing to ignore this remark, Iason lowered his gaze for a moment, gathering his thoughts. “So...how was your journey?”

Voshka laughed. “I see. We're back to pleasantries, then. I can see now I have my work cut out of me. But I enjoy a good challenge, Iason.”

“Is there anything special I can do to prepare for your arrival?”

“Ah. Yes. I do have one small request. Could you put me in the same room where my brother stayed?”

Though his blood ran cold at these words, Iason managed to keep a neutral expression frozen on his face. “If it pleases you.”

“Yes. It pleases me,” the Commander smiled. “And I'm looking forward to finding out what I can do to please you. Or perhaps you'd like to tell me now?”

“Tell him to fuck off,” Riki suggested, much to Iason's mortification. He was standing just a few feet away, hands on his hips, staring at him darkly.

“What was that?” Voshka asked, a bit taken aback.

“Pet,” Iason hissed. “Back to the chair. NOW.” Riki, though still jealous over what he'd overheard, also had the sense to know he couldn't push the issue. He knew that look on Iason's face. The Blondie was furious.

Iason turned back to the monitor, wondering if the Commander had heard exactly what Riki had said. “Please...accept my apology. My pet is...at times a bit unruly.”

Now Voshka relaxed, smiling. “Ah. Your pet. I see. I must confess, I rather prefer the unruly ones to the docile, mindless fare that's flooding the galaxy these days.”

“I quite agree with you.”

“Do you? I find that rather surprising. Very surprising, actually, given that you're the Head of the Syndicate. Isn't that what Amoi is famous for? Your obedient pets with inbred controls and whatnot?”

“Yes,” Iason sighed. “But that's because docility is what's generally demanded. I'm...a bit of a deviant, in that regard.”

Voshka smiled at this. “I like the sound of that. A bit of a deviant, eh?”

“I'm afraid so.” Feeling the need to make up for Riki's rudeness, Iason lowered his gaze for a moment, and then looked directly at Voshka with a smile that was a bit more than just friendly.

“I think my heart just stopped,” Voshka remarked, putting his hand on his chest. “Yes. I am quite dead.”

Iason laughed.

“Now, I must confess, you've quite perplexed me. I'm getting mixed signals from you. You...are very elusive, Iason.”

At that moment, an incoming alert from Jupiter flashed onto the screen.

“Forgive me, I must go,” Iason said, quickly. “Jupiter is summoning me.”

“I've frightened you off, I fear.”

“No, no. It truly is a summons. One I cannot ignore.”

“Then...until we meet tomorrow.”

“Until then.”

Switching off the transmission abruptly, Iason loaded Jupiter's signal.

“Your pet just insulted the ruler of Alpha Zen,” Jupiter announced, without any other greeting.

“My apologies. In his defense, he is quite ill.”

“Are you going to be able to control his behavior when the Commander stays with you?”

“Of course,” Iason replied, though he felt far from confident on this point.

“He will be chained the duration of the Commander's visit,” Jupiter ordered.

“As you wish.”

“We are fortunate that Commander Khosi did not seem to take offense. That might have been disastrous, if he had reacted

differently.” Now Jupiter paused for a moment. “I am picking up signals that he is sexually attracted to you.”

“I'm aware of it.”

“Be careful, Iason.”

Iason was silent, wondering exactly what Jupiter meant. Had she also detected his own flirtatious behavior?

“We should proceed with Security enhancements immediately. I will be sending the automated units throughout the night. The organic units will arrive tomorrow.”

Iason smiled at Jupiter's referring to Amoian Security guards as “organic units.”

“Odi believes we should also coordinate with the Tanagura Police.”

“An excellent suggestion. Please have him proceed with that immediately.”

Iason nodded.

“Punish your pet,” Jupiter added, then abruptly ended the transmission.

The Blondie rose, now feeling quite angry with Riki. As he approached the chair he saw that his pet had abandoned it. He went to the bedroom and found Riki there, feigning sleep.

“I know you're awake.”

Riki groaned. “I don't feel so good.”

“No, and you're going to feel even worse after you've been punished. That was exceedingly foolish of you, Riki.”

“I know,” Riki admitted. “But can you put off my punishment until I'm better?”

“No. Jupiter demands it. And if you're well enough to be naughty, you're well enough to be punished.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I haven't decided yet.”

“It's only because I was jealous.”

Now Iason softened a bit. “Were you jealous, pet?”

“I just told you I was. Why is it, whenever I tell you something, you're like... 'Did you, pet?' Or 'Were you, pet?' Don't you believe me

when I tell you the first time?" Riki demanded. "Yes, I was jealous. He was hitting on you. You know that, right?"

"Yes," Iason sighed. "Now, I know it won't be easy for you. But you simply must be on your best behavior while the Commander is here. You'll be in chains, by Jupiter's orders."

"Bloody hell," Riki groaned. "Blast that fucking computer anyway."

"Hush, pet."

At that moment, Riki was seized by a fit of coughing. Iason watched him with concern, his anger dissipating.

"Perhaps we can put off your punishment until tomorrow," he conceded, finally.

Riki gave him a grateful look, rewarding him with a small smile. "Thanks."

Iason nodded, approaching him and then sitting down next to him on the bed. "Pet," he whispered, brushing back the hair from the mongrel's eyes.

"Yeah?"

"You must be on your best behavior during the Commander's visit. No matter what he does or says, you must maintain a semblance of respect for him."

Riki sighed. "Whatever."

"I know this won't be easy for you. There's no question in my mind that Khosi will attempt to seduce me."

"And what are you going to do? Let him fuck you?"

"I have no such intentions."

"Promise me you won't."

Iason smiled at this. "Is my pet jealous?"

"Bloody hell. I already told you I was jealous, like a million times. I just want you to promise you won't sleep with him."

"Very well. I promise I will not...willingly engage in coital congress with the Commander."

"And now you should cut the palm of your hand and seal the promise in blood."

"No, pet. My word is as good as blood."

“Okay whatever. But, you know if you go back on your promise, I'll never be able to trust you about anything.”

“Have I ever made a promise I haven't kept, Riki?”

The mongrel thought about this for a moment. “No. I guess not. Not technically.”

Iason smiled, bending down to kiss his pet on the forehead. “Riki...I love you so very much,” he whispered.

“Do you?”

Riki's dark reply came as a surprise. A bit hurt, the Blondie paused for a moment before replying. “You know I do. What makes you...doubt me?”

“I don't know.”

“Pet. Tell me.”

Riki sighed. “I just don't see how you can love...a mongrel. I mean, if mongrels mean so little to you.”

Now Iason paused again, trying to understand Riki's train of thought. “Are you referring to our conversation earlier today?”

“Partly that. And partly just...your whole attitude...how all you Elites look down on us.”

“My...attitude? Have I ever mistreated you, Riki?”

Riki laughed.

“Why is that funny?”

“Well, what the fuck do you mean, have you ever mistreated me? Fuck yes! You're always punishing me, you make me wear chains when we go out in public, and you...you...yes! The answer is fucking yes.”

“Punishing you and having you wear chains is hardly mistreating you, Riki. I've only done what a good master should. If I've punished you, it's because you've misbehaved. You know that.”

“But...why should I have to obey you in the first place! You...fucking brought me here and forced me to do whatever you wanted. Granted, so maybe now I enjoy some things but still, it all started out completely against my will.”

“But,” Iason's brow furrowed as he tried to understand Riki's reasoning, “you're my pet, Riki. That's why you must obey me.”

“Okay and how many other mongrels are pets? You wanna know? I'll tell you. Zero mongrels. Zero mongrels are pets. So maybe I was born in the slums, but that doesn't mean you have the right to just grab me off the street and do whatever you want to me.”

“That's unfair, pet. You know that you offered your body to me in repayment for--”

“My body! I meant like a freaking blow job or a good fuck or something! Not the rest of my life!”

“Riki, what are you saying? That you want me to let you go?”

“Yes. Let me go. Then you'll find out if I really love you or not. If I love you, I'll stay of my own free will, but on my own terms.”

Now Iason sighed, unhappy with where the conversation had gone, and so quickly. Although he could appreciate Riki's request, in his heart he was afraid to give his pet the freedom he desired. He was afraid because the thought of losing Riki was too much to bear. “Oh pet,” he whispered.

“Let me guess. That's a no.”

“I can't let you go, Riki. I want you for my pet.”

Riki nodded. “That's what I mean. You love me as your pet, not as an Amoian of equal value and worth.”

“That's not fair, Riki. I don't think of you as...inferior to me, in any way.”

“But I am inferior. I'm a mongrel, and you're an Elite. Not just any Elite, either, the fucking Head of the Syndicate Blondie Elite.”

“I've told you before, Riki. There are certain societal expectations that we must meet. But, in private, I will always treat you with dignity and respect.”

Riki snorted at this. “Like the time you put me in the T-stand and helped me take a piss? Is that what you mean by dignity and respect? Or maybe all the times you turned me over your knee and spanked me like some runny-nosed school kid.”

“Now, pet. You know perfectly well that those occasions you speak of were instances when you were being punished. Would you

like me to review for you the transgressions that mandated your punishment?"

"No," Riki sighed.

"I must confess, I'm rather perplexed, Riki. You act as though you only now realize the truth of the world we live in. It is hardly my fault that I am an Elite, just as you had no control over your birth status. So, why are you so angry?"

"I'm not angry," the mongrel protested. "I'm...bitter."

At this, Iason was unable to help smiling, finding Riki's qualification amusing.

"See! That's what I mean. You don't respect me!"

"Pet. Of course I respect you. Just because you sometimes amuse me doesn't mean I don't respect you. I concede I can see why you might feel bitter. If I were in your situation, perhaps I would feel resentment as well."

"And if were an Elite," Riki began, then fell silent.

"If you were an Elite, what?"

"If I were one....the first thing I'd do is go to the slums and feed all the kids that are digging through the trash for their next meal."

Iason listened with concern, having been completely unaware of this reality. "Is this true, pet? Children look for food in the garbage?"

Riki nodded.

"But...where are their parents?"

"Probably dead. There are lots of orphans in the slums. Too many for the Midas Orphanage."

Iason fell silent for a moment, pondering this. "Then, suppose we build an orphanage in Ceres? With a school, room and board?"

"We?" Riki blinked.

"Yes. I will finance whatever you have in mind. You plan the project, and I'll hire an architect and contractors to build it. Then we'll have to staff it."

Excited, Riki now sat up straight. "You mean anything I want? Suppose I want to put in a pool?"

"Anything. A pool would be a suitable addition."

“A playground? Billiard tables? A gymnasium?”

“Certainly...but also think in terms of libraries, collections, and planetariums.”

“Can I help design it?”

“Of course. So...I take it this idea appeals to you?”

“Yes,” Riki admitted, his eyes shining. “It's fucking awesome.”

“We'll probably have to name it after Jupiter,” Iason remarked, a little irritated. He was not looking forward to explaining to Jupiter why he was financing a huge development project in the slums.

“That's all right. Hey! Do we have to call it an orphanage? Couldn't we call it an Academy?”

Iason smiled. “Does it really make a difference whether it's called an orphanage or an Academy?”

“Definitely. An Academy is way better.”

“Then, perhaps it should be open to all Ceres children?”

“Yes. All of them.”

“I wonder who I should contact regarding the design,” Iason mused.

“Who made this building?”

“Ah. This was designed by Megala Chi, rebuilt after the original tower was damaged in an earthquake.”

“Can we get him?”

“Certainly. Although,” now Iason hesitated, wondering if Megala could be trusted to keep silent about the project until he was ready to tell Jupiter. “He may not be the best choice.”

“What about the Taming Tower, then? Who designed that?”

Iason smiled. “Megala Chi.”

“The Emporium?”

Iason nodded. “The Emporium, too. His style must appeal to you. Very well, I'll contact him...but probably not until after the trade convention.”

Now Riki was seized with another fit of coughing, his face turning red as he struggled to catch his breath.

“It's time for a new patch,” Iason decided. “I'll go retrieve one.”

Riki nodded, unable to speak.

* * *

"It smells so good," Kahlan whined, as the aroma of the Aristian Chocolate Cake filled Omaki's home. He and Ru were alone in the kitchen, sitting at the table while the cake was baking.

Ru smiled proudly. "I hope it tastes good, too."

"Of course it will. You made it. I'm just bummed we have to wait until tomorrow to eat it."

"You got to lick the bowl," Ru pointed out.

Kahlan grinned. "Yeah. That was good, too. Just like my mother used to make." As soon as he said the words, he fell silent, a shadow creeping into his features.

Ru noticed his expression, curious. "I've noticed that you rarely speak about your family," he prompted.

Now Kahlan grew despondent, staring down at the table. "They're all dead."

"All?"

Kahlan nodded. "They were all...slaughtered."

"Sweet Astrajia," Ru whispered. "I'm so sorry, Kahlan. I can't imagine...what that must be like for you."

Now Kahlan looked up, his eyes shining with tears. For a long moment their gazes locked, inaugurating a new level of intimacy between them. He nodded, unable to respond, his throat constricting. A single tear spilled over and traced a path of sorrow down his face. He wiped it away, angrily.

"Hey," Ru said, reaching out to put his hand on Kahlan's knee. "It's all right to cry. I know I would."

These words seemed to release a floodgate that had held his emotions locked within him for over two years. He finally acknowledged his horror of what had happened that day, when his father, mother, sisters and brothers had all been taken from him in the space of a few minutes. Tears now streaming down his face, Kahlan sobbed as Ru held him, comforting him.

Yousi opened his eyes, startled to find Aki standing next to him, pointing his laser at his face. "I'm going to squirt you if you don't get up," he warned.

"You'd make a good alarm clock," Yousi answered, yawning. "I should take you home with me, and then I'd never oversleep again."

"I can't go with you and be your alarm clock," Aki replied, solemnly. "I'm going to live with Sir Iason soon."

"Truly?" Yousi was a bit perplexed at this. "Why?"

Now Aki sighed, lowering his gun and sitting down on the bed dejectedly. "Because Jupiter won't let me stay with my Master anymore. She says I'm too young to be his pet."

Yousi nodded. "You are young. You're just a little boy."

"I'm not a little boy!" Aki cried, fiercely. "I'm going to be nine in two days!"

"My apologies," Yousi smiled. "You're quite right. Nine is a very important year."

Now Aki relaxed, smiling. "Is it?"

"Oh yes. I remember when I was nine. I...." Suddenly Yousi fell silent. He *remembered* when he was nine. He could remember his childhood, something that had always eluded him before. Now, it was all there, his days at the Academy, his childhood games and concerns.

"When you were nine, what?" Aki yelled, impatient.

"Aki," Omaki scolded, standing in the doorway. "Didn't I tell you not to bother Sir Yousi?"

"But he's telling me all about being nine!"

Omaki took one look at Yousi and knew something was up. "Aki, mind me. Go to your room until I come to you."

"No!" Aki replied, defiantly.

"Someone wants a spanking," the Blondie warned.

"Who?" Aki asked, puzzled, looking at Yousi.

"Aki, go to your room. Or I'll turn you over my knee right here."

Sighing, Aki obeyed with great reluctance, feeling he was being deprived of some very important information about the importance of being nine. As he passed Omaki he aimed his gun at him, threatening to squirt him.

“Don’t you dare,” Omaki warned.

For a moment, the bold Commander considered defying his master and giving him a good squirt. But, in the interest of maintaining the integrity of his bottom, he opted to abort this demonstration of insubordination, choosing instead the wise, though less exciting, path of submission.

The Blondie smiled as the boy passed him, suddenly filled with an urge to pick him up and hold him tight.

“I am sorry he woke you.”

Yousi shook his head. “I’ve been sleeping far too long. It seems all I do is sleep these days.”

Omaki nodded. “It probably has something to do with the return of your memories. You need more rest than usual.”

“I don’t understand what’s happening to me.”

Now Omaki sighed. “I don’t either, old friend. But, if there’s anything I can do....”

“We were punished. You and I. In the...Headmaster’s chambers at the Academy.”

Omaki laughed. “Many times, Yousi. You remember this now?”

Yousi nodded. “And if I recall correctly, those pranks we played were all your idea.”

Now Omaki grinned. “It seems you have a selective memory. I assure you, you came up with plenty good ones yourself.”

“Did I?”

Omaki nodded. “Oh yes. My favorite was when you put invisible ink with temperature-triggered colorant manifestation in all the soap dispensers, right before Examinations. Everyone had to take the exam with red hands. And then...when the Headmaster called us down, you said, ‘Well at least I wasn’t caught red-handed.’”

Yousi laughed at this, a loud, bright laugh that caught Omaki off-guard. He sounded exactly as he once did, and the gleam in his eye gave him a look of decided intelligence. It was remarkable, what was happening the Blondie.

Yousi was returning.

* * *

As soon as Raoul entered his suite, he was confronted by Pixie, who sat at his feet and mewed up at him, angrily.

“You,” Raoul answered, grumpily. He took one look at the apartment and, seeing how the kitten had managed to knock over everything in his power, grew angry. “Naughty Pixel,” he scolded, having already forgotten the kitten’s name.

Pixie mewed back defiantly. He was hungry.

“I suppose I have to feed you,” Raoul muttered. “But I should really just...put you in a box and punish you. You made a mess.”

As he made definite movements toward the kitchen, the kitten changed his tactics, growing exceedingly affectionate. He began rubbing up against the Blondie’s leg as Raoul put food in his dish. The water dish had been turned upside down in protest of its emptiness, and Raoul had to smile a little at this. He was also amused that Yui had predicted the kitten’s behavior, something he would never have considered.

He was standing there, watching Pixie eat, when there came an alert at the door.

“Now what?” Raoul went back to the foyer and flipped on his viewer.

It was Megala Chi.

Sighing, he opened the door. What did Megala want now?

“Sorry to disturb you, Raoul,” Megala smiled. “I know you’ve just returned from...someplace. But I was concerned because I heard a lot of...strange noises coming from your suite last night. Crashes and such.”

“Yes,” Raoul sighed. “We have a...kitten.”

“Ah!” Now Megala peeked around him, and apprehending the state of disarray in Raoul’s usually immaculate great hall, raised an eyebrow with surprise.

“My my. Yui has some work cut out for him.”

“Yui is not here presently,” Raoul replied, and then immediately regretted supplying this information.

“Oh?” Megala waited, hoping for more details, but these were not forthcoming. “Would you like me to send Nomi to you?”

“I appreciate the offer, but it’s not necessary. I’ll simply call housekeeping.”

“If it suits you. And...when will Yui be returning to you?” Megala pressed, hoping for more details. “I assume he must be...on an errand?”

“Not exactly,” Raoul replied, his voice now a bit clipped.

Sensing the Blondie’s reluctance to offer anything further on this point, Megala sighed, disappointed. He desperately wanted to know what was going on between Raoul and Yui. There had been numerous occasions recently when he felt certain that activities of a sexual nature were taking place next door. When he sat at his kitchen table, he was immediately juxtaposed to Raoul’s bedroom, he had heard many suspicious sounds of late.

Megala, who had designed the Tower, had deliberately architected this arrangement, using thin materials between the walls so that he could listen to the great Blondie masturbate. Now he regretted not installing some sort of camera system for remote viewing--or at least a peephole of some kind.

And while Megala enjoyed listening to the sound of Raoul climaxing, he was much less enthusiastic about the new addition of a second voice to the performance, one that that was considerably higher, but definitely not female. Raoul’s most recent pet had been female, but the Blondie had not replaced her after she was sold to a brothel, which Megala found puzzling in and of itself.

The most disturbing thing about Raoul’s new perversion--if Megala’s hunch regarding Yui was true--was that he did not seem to be the only one indulging in such behavior. Megala was equally

convinced, having just returned from his villa, that Xian and Juthian were engaged in inappropriate congress.

And of course, everyone knew about Iason and his mongrel pet. And there had been all manner of talk about Omaki Ghan and his two pets, the little boy and the Xeronian, although Omaki did not particularly make his indiscretions a secret.

Megala was beginning to wonder if all the Blondies were becoming corrupt. And he wondered how much Jupiter knew about what went on among them.

“Is there...something else I can help you with?” Raoul asked, politely, trying to hide his irritation. He knew Megala quite well and could tell when the Blondie was trying to fish for information. “I’d invite you in for tea, but I’m quite tired. I need to rest.”

Megala brightened a little at this, happy that Raoul had at least made some pretense of courtesy. “No, no. Forgive me. I’ll not disturb you any further.” With a slight nod, he left, pondering the Blondie’s evasive replies and wondering if his suspicions were, indeed, correct.

* * *

“I really should be in the kitchen,” Tai protested. “I need to prepare a few more desserts, just in case something goes wrong.”

“Relax,” Odi answered, pushing him toward the bed. “You’ve been in there all day. Everything’s going to be perfect. What could possibly go wrong?”

“I could trip and drop the torte,” Tai answered. “Or perhaps I forgot to put sugar in it. Then we’d have no dessert, and Master Iason would be very angry.”

“You’re not going to drop it and you know perfectly well you put all the ingredients in...whatever it is you made.”

“A Gardanian Vanilla Silk Torte.”

“Mmmm. I can taste it already. But you need to take some time off and relax and get some sleep. Tomorrow’s a big day and you don’t want to be running on no steam.”

“But suppose the Commander doesn’t like tortes,” Tai began.

“Then he’s a big idiot and I’ve no patience with him,” Odi replied.

Tai giggled at this, allowing the bodyguard to push him down onto the bed.

“Anyway, you can bake something else in the morning. Right now I want to have a taste of you.”

Tai, suddenly seized with a horrible thought, grew alarmed. “What if he doesn’t like vanilla?” he exclaimed. “I should have made it chocolate!”

Odi laughed, touching Tai’s forehead with his finger. “Is there an off switch in there somewhere? You’re obsessing again.”

“Sorry,” Tai mumbled.

“Tis all right. But...just for the next half hour, why don’t you forget about the Commander. Yes?”

“I’ll try.”

“Good. Then,” Odi bent down and proffered a gentle, slow kiss, “let’s get undressed, and we can proceed with what we discussed earlier. If you want to, that is?”

Tai swallowed, feeling a bit nervous, but also excited. He nodded, smiling. “You’re really going to let me?”

“Oh yes. It would be...my pleasure.”

“I don’t know exactly what to do,” Tai confessed, blushing.

“I know. I’ll help you. Get undressed.”

Tai obeyed, and when both of them were naked, they kissed again, for a long time, rolling around on the bed. The Aristian could feel Odi’s erection against his leg, and his heart started to pound as he remembered the bodyguard’s earlier warning, that he might try to take him. Although Tai was interested in Odi’s offer, he was less certain about giving up his own virginity.

“You’re trembling,” Odi whispered, smiling.

“I’m scared.”

“There’s nothing to be frightened of. You’re going to love it.” Odi’s hand slid down his body, stopping when he found the boy’s

rigid erection. With a firm hand, he began slowly stroking him. "You're quite ready, I think."

Tai groaned his reply, thrusting a bit into the bodyguard's hand.

Odi smiled, and then reached over to the bedside table to retrieve a jar of lubrication. Scooping out a liberal amount of the gel onto his hand, he proceeded to coat Tai's member with the warm substance, eliciting gasps of pleasure from the young Aristian.

"Oh! That feels good, Odi!"

"Of course it does. Now, you dip your fingers into it."

"Why?"

Odi laughed. "Can't you guess, darling?"

Tai thought about it for a moment. "I'm going to...stick my fingers inside you?"

"That's right. One at a time though, all right? You have to give me time to get accustomed to you. Once I'm opened enough, then we can move to the next level."

"What's the next level?" Tai asked, innocently.

The bodyguard laughed, bending down to proffer a kiss on his forehead. "You're so uncorrupted and sweet, Tai. The next level is you stick your cock in my ass."

"Oh," Tai answered, feeling exceedingly foolish. "Right."

"So," Odi held the jar out, expectantly.

With shaking hands, Tai managed to scoop out enough gel to coat his fingers.

"It will probably be easiest, this time, if I get on all fours. Then you'll be able to see what you're doing."

"Okay," Tai agreed, feeling a bit uncertain. But as soon as Odi presented himself, it was immediately apparent where his finger should go. "I see it," he exclaimed, pressing a finger up to the bodyguard's portal. "It's here, right?"

Odi smiled at Tai's innocence. "That's it. Now, go ahead and slide your finger in."

"Are you sure?"

Odi laughed. "Yes. I'm quite sure."

“Then...” With deliberate slowness, the Aristian inserted a finger into Odi, marveling over the sensation. “It’s really warm in there,” he remarked.

“Thrust your finger a bit, Tai.”

Tai obeyed, using the moment to continue stroking himself, enjoying the warm, slippery lubrication that coated his swollen cock. He moaned, unable to help himself.

“Be careful, or you’ll spend yourself before you’re inside me,” Odi warned, when he looked back and apprehended Tai’s autoerotic project.

“I can’t help it. It feels so good.”

“Then let’s proceed. Put another finger in, Tai.”

The boy did so, marveling at how quickly the tight space seemed to accommodate him. “You’re opening up, I think,” he observed.

Odi closed his eyes, enjoying the stimulation. He was not only excited from Tai’s fingers, but from the boy’s whole attitude, his complete innocence in the realm of all things sexual. “All right, Tai. You can take your fingers out now. Slowly. And then you’re going to do the same thing, only this time with your cock.”

Tai removed his fingers and positioned himself behind the bodyguard, pressing the tip of his member up to Odi’s portal. “Are you sure this will fit?” he whispered, worried.

“I’m sure,” Odi replied, smiling. “Now, just thrust a bit, just to get your head inside me, and then wait until I tell you to proceed.”

“Okay.” Tai held his organ in his hand, and pressed against the opening. “It won’t go,” he remarked.

“Yes, it will. Push a bit harder.”

Tai did so, and this time he slid inside the bodyguard. Odi winced. “Oh. Stop,” he ordered, a bit surprised at the pain. “You’re a big boy, aren’t you, Tai?”

“I’m sorry,” Tai whispered, worried. “I’m too big for you, aren’t I?”

“No, Tai. It just takes a bit longer to get accustomed to you. I’m starting to relax already.”

Now Tai fell silent, feeling overcome with an urge to sink into the warm, wet tightness that was wrapped around the tip of his cock. "Can I go further now?" he asked, impatiently.

"Go ahead."

Tai grabbed onto the bodyguard's hips, instinctively thrusting forward. Odi groaned, and so did he, both of them overcome with the sensation, though for different reasons.

"Oh. This feels good, Odi," Tai breathed, excited. "I want to...thrust. Can I thrust now?"

Odi, though still in a bit of pain, was enjoying Tai's delight. "Yes, Tai. Just do whatever comes naturally."

Thrilled with this carte blanche to fuck at will, the young Aristian immediately plundered Odi with such enthusiasm that the bodyguard found it hard to believe Tai had never had sex before.

"You're fucking me very hard," he noted.

"Is it too hard?" Tai asked, though now rather disinclined to hold back.

"No. I'm just a bit...surprised. I expected you to be a bit more...I don't know...timid. But it's good. I like it."

"You said to do what comes naturally," Tai replied, pulling back on his hips firmly as the thrust deep within the bodyguard. "This is what my body feels like doing."

Odi laughed. "Tai, I do believe you were bred for pleasure."

"It feels so...hot...and tight and...wet," Tai replied, panting.

"Oh...I can feel it coming, Odi."

"Just let it happen."

"It's coming soon. That is...it's coming now. Oh yes." With that, the Aristian climaxed, ejaculating hard, crying out so loud that Odi had to smile. Afterwards they lay down together for some moments.

"I do believe you enjoyed that," Odi whispered, finally.

"Oh yes. It was better...than I even thought it would be," Tai replied, truthfully. "Can we do it again sometime?"

"I think that could be arranged." Odi reached out and traced a finger down the boy's face. "Now...how about you return the favor, Tai, and let me take you?"

"I don't know," Tai replied, nervously.

"Don't you want to give me pleasure?"

"Of course. But...perhaps I could do...what I did before?"

"Come on, Tai," Odi pressed. "Let me fuck you."

Tai thought about this for a moment, wanting to please Odi but feeling uncomfortable about giving up his virginity completely. He knew that he'd already engaged in acts that were considered impure by the priesthood, and that surrendering his own body was only a technical formality, but even so he found that he was not ready to relinquish this one last thing. Once he'd lost his virginity, he would be defiled forever.

"Please," Odi pleaded.

"I'm not ready," Tai replied, a little hesitantly.

Disappointed, Odi was also a bit angry. In truth, he had expected Tai to admit him, and the boy's refusal was irritating.

"Then, I'm going to have to ask you to sleep in your own bed tonight," Odi replied, coldly. "I won't get any sleep with you next to me, knowing I can't have you."

Surprised by Odi's sudden change of demeanor, Tai was also a bit defensive. "You said we didn't have to do anything," he pointed out.

"I know," Odi conceded. "But all the same, I've got to get a good night's sleep. I don't mean to be rude but, you'll have to leave."

Hurt, Tai stared back at him for a few moments before replying. "Don't you want me to...do something first?"

"No. Just leave."

Stunned, Tai slowly sat up and gathered his clothes. "I don't understand you," he whispered, sadly.

Odi knew his cool reaction was unwarranted, but he couldn't help himself. He was angry and frustrated. The boy had given him a good fucking--one of the most painful he'd ever endured, in fact--and Odi felt...entitled. The fact that Tai had refused him was infuriating. Though he knew he should relent and invite Tai back to his bed, he found that he couldn't. He was too angry. And he was stubborn.

Tai got dressed with deliberate lethargy, as though half expecting the bodyguard to change his mind and summon him back. When Odi failed to do so, he found himself growing uncharacteristically annoyed.

“So, you only offered yourself to me so you could fuck me? Is that it? I thought you’d be above something like that,” he remarked.

Odi did not reply, feeling a bit shamed by this, but at the same time unwilling to budge on his position.

“It seems I’ve misjudged you,” Tai said, after a moment of silence. “I guess maybe you’re not who I thought you were.”

With that, he left Odi’s room, fuming, but also exceedingly hurt. As he exited the room, he nearly collided with Toma in his hurry to return to his own room.

Surprised, Toma opened his mouth to speak, but then fell silent upon seeing the look on Tai’s face. The boy was...angry. Some sort of argument with Odi, perhaps? Tai mumbled an apology and then stepped around him, continuing on to this room without another word.

Toma stood for some moments, wondering about the situation. Then, Odi emerged from his room, heading toward the west balcony, his expression dark and brooding.

With a smile, Toma followed him.

Memories and Shifting Dreams

Toma followed Odi past the indoor pool area to the outside balcony where he found him, sitting up on the ledge with his back to the far wall, smoking.

“Aren’t you scared you’ll fall?” Toma asked, smiling.

Odi, who had turned to see who was coming outside when he heard the door open, was disappointed that it was Toma, and not Tai, who joined him. He was still angry, and in a very bad mood, but it would have helped if Tai had come after him.

Shrugging, he took another drag. “That would probably be the best thing that could happen to me,” he replied, wryly.

“Hmmm. Bad day?”

“You could say that.”

Toma nodded. “I bet. With the Commander coming and all.”

“It’s not so much that.”

Toma approached him, trying to rein in his curiosity. “I’m not trying to pry or anything. But I got the impression perhaps you and Tai had a falling out?”

Odi looked surprised at this and for a moment said nothing. Then, “does everyone know about us?”

“I don’t know about everyone, but it’s pretty obvious to me that the two of you are...involved.”

“We’re not exactly...involved,” Odi countered. “That is, we could be, but Tai’s not up for...where I want to take things.”

Now Toma leaned against the ledge, though he was too nervous to join Odi up on it. "I get it. He won't go to bed with you?"

"It's...complicated. Actually I probably shouldn't be talking about it."

"Why not?"

"Because...it doesn't seem...right."

Trying to hide his disappointment, Toma shrugged. "Whatever. I just thought maybe you needed someone to talk to."

Odi took another drag, eying Toma. "You're modified, right? Are you sexually active?"

"That's a rather personal question," Toma answered, then smiled. "But I don't mind telling you. No, I'm not sexually active. But I'd probably give myself to...the right person." With that Toma gazed at Odi so suggestively that the bodyguard dropped his cigarette, burning his leg.

"Fuck!"

Toma instinctively reached out to grab him. "Don't fall."

For a moment Odi did not reply, the boy's hands seeming to burn into his skin. Toma slowly let his hands fall away. "Are you coming on to me?" he asked, finally.

Toma smiled. "What if I was?"

Now Odi let his eyes take in the boy's rather small frame, considering the possibilities. He was still a bit aroused, having never consummated his lust. He needed a good fuck. But if Toma was still a virgin, he would have to show restraint. He was probably better off masturbating to a holoclip. Yet it was hard to resist a pretty young boy who was practically throwing himself at his feet.

"Then I'd say you'd better be careful about who you proposition," he whispered.

Toma's heart was beating so hard, he could hardly think straight. He hadn't seriously expected things to move this fast. And now there was no question in his mind that Odi was...interested.

Odi tossed his smoke over the ledge, his eyes glimmering. "If you're serious, come here." He slipped off the ledge, leaning back against it, and held out his hands invitingly.

Though he was trembling, Toma moved forward, unsure what to do. Odi quickly relieved him of his uncertainty by pulling him close, pressing his body hard against his own, as he bent down to kiss him. His hands slid down his body to his ass and remained there as he explored him with his tongue.

Toma felt as though he were in heaven. His limbs felt like liquid in the bodyguard's arms; Odi's kiss seemed to reach deep inside him to a place no one else had every touched before. He'd never really been kissed before...not like this.

Odi was less enthusiastic about the kiss. Although he enjoyed it, it seemed somehow, hollow to him. He knew, in his heart, that it was Tai he wanted to be kissing, not Toma. And though there was no question in his mind Toma would be an enjoyable diversion for one night, he made up his mind during that kiss that he would not invite the boy to his bed. Not that night. And probably not ever.

Just as he pulled away and was about to tell Toma his decision, he was startled to see that they were no longer alone.

There, standing at the door, a look of horror and pain frozen on his face, was Tai.

"Tai," Odi exclaimed, immediately releasing Toma.

"How could you?" Tai whispered, immediately turning and rushing back inside.

"Shit." Odi immediately took off after him, without a backward glance at Toma, who stood, trembling, his hand pressed to his lips, unsure what to do.

"Tai!" Odi reached the Aristian, grabbing his arm.

"Let me go! Don't touch me!"

"Let me...let's talk about this."

"There's nothing to discuss! I saw you!"

"I know. That was...very bad of me. But I wasn't going to take things any further."

"I said let me go!" Tai hissed, pulling on his arm.

"Please, I can't stand to see you look at me this way," Odi pleaded.

“How else should I look at you! After everything we shared together...I meant nothing to you!”

“That’s not true. It’s not, Tai,” Odi protested, trying to push Tai back against the wall to prevent him from leaving.

“Stop it! Let me go!”

“Please...keep your voice down. Others will hear.”

This last comment seemed to sink into Tai’s consciousness, and he fell silent.

“Now, let me tell you what happened. He...Toma...came after me and...offered himself to me. I was still a bit worked up from...earlier. I guess I just wasn’t thinking straight.”

“That’s no excuse. I don’t care if he threw himself at you and begged you to fuck him to death, you didn’t have to take him up on it.”

A little surprised at Tai’s language, Odi paused for a moment. “You’re right. But...I’m not perfect, Tai.”

“I was planning to give myself to you. That’s what I came to tell you. That I would give myself to you, if you could wait nine days. But...that won’t happen now.”

“Oh Tai,” Odi whispered. “Please. Don’t do this. It was you I was thinking of, when I kissed Toma.”

“I’m going to be sick,” Tai replied, coldly. “Release me, Odi, or I’ll call for assistance.”

Hurt, Odi let Tai go. “Let’s not end it like this,” he begged. “Come to my bed tonight. We don’t have to do anything. Let’s just be together.”

“I’ve heard that before,” Tai retorted, narrowing his eyes. “No. I won’t be going to your bed tonight or any other night, Odi.” With that, Tai walked away, leaving the bodyguard to stare after him.

“Bloody hell,” he cursed, furious with himself for his own foolishness. He would have waited the nine days Tai wanted, gladly, for the prize that waited at the end. Just knowing the day it would happen would have been enough. And now he had spoiled it all with one kiss.

At that moment his communicator lit up, vibrating against his hip. He whipped it out, annoyed.

“Odi.”

“Hey. It’s...Freyn. You’d better come out here--the units have arrived.”

“Already? I thought they were coming later tonight?”

“Like I fucking know what’s going on? Just...come. There’s...a lot of them.”

“All right.”

Flipping off the phone, Odi headed back into the guest wing when he realized he’d simply left Toma out on the balcony. He hesitated a moment, trying to decide what to do. Though he was tempted to walk off and not deal with the situation, he knew he’d have to face Toma eventually.

Reluctantly, he went back outside.

“Is...Tai okay?” Toma asked, stupidly, but feeling the need to say something.

“No. He’s not okay.”

“I’m sorry. It’s...my fault.”

“Actually, no. It’s not,” Odi replied, fumbling with the environmental panel to reseal the garden. The transparent wall moved slowly toward the ledge, humming. Toma startled, moving away from the ledge as the unit came down.

“About...what happened,” Toma began.

“Let’s just leave it,” Odi suggested. “I shouldn’t have kissed you.”

“Oh,” Toma replied, falling silent. He was rather disappointed with the way things had turned out, given how auspicious the evening’s beginning had seemed only moments before.

“I’m not trying to be rude,” Odi continued, “but I need to go out and deal with the security units that have arrived.”

“Sure.” Hurt, but not wanting to show it, Toma knelt down, pretending to prop up a plant near his feet. “Go on. I think I stepped on this thing here. I’d better...try and fix it.”

Odi nodded and left without another word.

For some minutes Toma continued to fumble with the plant, fussing over its non-existent injury. His tears fell from his face onto the fuzzy petals of the Amoian moonflower, gifting it with a drink of his loneliness and disappointment. As chance would have it, Ios peered out from behind a cloud at that moment, his moonlight falling onto the shy bloom, whose creamy white petals sprung open with such force and beauty that Toma gasped. The center of the moonflower was brilliant red--very rare, considered by Amoians to be a good omen whenever found. He looked up at the moon, feeling almost as if great Ios had spoken to him, comforting him.

* * *

“This is creepy. They’re just standing there,” Askel whispered. “What else are they supposed to do? They’re machines.”

“Well, can’t we turn the holographic projections on? So they at least look Amoian?”

“Good idea,” Freyn conceded. He stood in front of one unit, a bit uncertain which button to press. “You. Transform into Amoian form,” he commanded, finally.

The unit obeyed, projecting an image of a young, attractive, extremely muscular bodyguard.

Askel grinned. “Much better.”

“All of you. Transform,” Freyn commanded.

The units all obeyed, transforming into the same young bodyguard.

“That’s even more creepy,” Askel whispered. “They’re all exactly the same.”

“All of you. Transform into unique forms,” Freyn tried.

The units complied, this time choosing bizarre 3-dimensional shapes, descending globules of plasma, or rotating rings around pulsating orbs.

Askel giggled. “You did say unique forms.”

Freyn sighed. “All units...transform into different male Amoians.”

“Attractive males,” Askel added.

Immediately, the units transformed again, this time choosing spectacularly handsome masculine forms, all of them completely naked and some rather frighteningly endowed.

“Perfect,” Askel announced, grinning.

Freyn shook his head, though he couldn’t suppress a smile. “With appropriate bodyguard attire or amour.”

Finally, the units appeared as a retinue of soldiers, all stunningly handsome and well armed, in shiny, elaborate armor.

“They’re beautiful. But they’re really stupid,” Askel remarked.

Freyn nodded. “They’ll do for brute force. This is mostly just to psyche out the Alphazenians.”

One male, a tall, rather muscular one with longish brown hair, began to approach the brothers.

“He’s malfunctioning!” Askel exclaimed.

“You! Cease movement!” Freyn commanded, pointing at the errant unit.

“Am I still allowed to breathe?” he replied, with a slight smile.

“Ahhh!” Askel yelped. “He’s scary!”

“Idiot,” Freyn hissed, suddenly realizing their error. “That one’s not an automatic unit.”

“I apologize. I...didn’t mean to frighten you. I thought you saw me walk up just now.”

The brothers, now both mortified at their reaction to who was obviously the expected fourth bodyguard, fell silent for a moment.

“I’m Ayuda,” the bodyguard said, after a moment. He smiled, a dazzling smile that left the brothers breathless.

“Holy shit,” Askel whispered.

“Excuse me?”

Freyn elbowed his brother, eliciting a yelp from him. “Don’t mind us. We’re a little overexcited, what with the Commander coming and all. We’re really not used to anything more than guarding fancy Blondie parties and such. I’m Freyn. And this moron here is my brother Askel.”

“Hey,” Askel protested, rubbing his side.

“Nice to meet you,” Ayuda answered, with a slight bow. “I’m...reporting for duty?”

“Ah. Yes. Um...Odi should be here...momentarily.”

“He’s the only one who knows what’s going on,” Askel clarified.

“Idiot. I know what’s going on,” Freyn retorted, indignantly.

“Since when?”

“Since...always!”

“Yeah? You thought Ayuda here was an automated unit!”

“So did you!”

“Yes, but--”

“I take it...Odi...is the head of security?”

The brothers ceased arguing for a moment. “Yeah. We already buzzed him. I don’t where the fuck he is.”

As if on cue, the door to the penthouse slid open and Odi emerged, taking in the scene without much reaction, as though he saw a hallway full of armed beautiful men every day. He appraised Ayuda, immediately realizing he was the additional bodyguard he had called in.

“I’m Odi,” he greeted, with a nod. “You must be Ayuda?”

“Yes.”

Odi looked him over, pleased with the bodyguard’s impressive physique and rather pronounced muscles. He would be perfect for Iason’s private bodyguard. “You’ll do very well,” he commented.

“Thank you,” Ayuda replied, with a slight smile.

“You’ve been briefed?”

“Yes,” Ayuda answered, holding up his cellpad. “The Commander is due sometime tomorrow?”

“His ETA is about N19:00, but we’re assuming he could come at any time.”

Ayuda nodded. “Then, what shall I do now?”

“I’ll take you around the penthouse and show you everything. And introduce you to Sir Iason.”

Now Odi seemed to see the automated units for the first time. “Did they come looking like this?” he asked, mystified.

“We made them transform,” Askel replied, grinning.

“Well, this is unacceptable. They look more like a harem than an army. Have them transform into less attractive, more formidable forms. And some units should remain mecha.”

“Can’t we keep one or two nice ones?” Askel protested, pointing out his favorites. “If they’re all mean-looking, I’ll get creeped out.”

“How did you ever become a bodyguard?” Odi demanded, shaking his head. “Very well. You may keep two as they are.”

Ayuda struggled to keep from laughing, finding the brothers the most ridiculously absurd bodyguards he’d ever encountered. He was still desperately trying not to lose it completely over their initial reaction to his entrance, the way the smaller one--Askel--had screamed, and how neither could distinguish an automated unit from a real Amoian. It was no wonder Odi had called for an additional bodyguard. He was, frankly, a bit surprised that these were the bodyguards of Iason Mink.

But, perhaps they had qualities he had not yet perceived. Though perception was one of Ayuda’s many gifts. He noticed everything, and within minutes he usually had developed a fairly accurate cognitive map of his surroundings. He knew that everything in his environment was potentially important information, and he was very careful about taking note of every detail. As he followed Odi, he was keenly aware that the bodyguard was upset about something. He could tell this from the stiffness of Odi’s shoulders, and the way his jaw was set. His hesitation as they passed the kitchen alerted him that the source of his angst was located within; unless Odi was afraid of the upside-down caramel cake he could smell baking, Ayuda guessed that Odi and the chef had some sort of “issue.” Romance perhaps?

Odi started to pass the kitchen and then stopped. “I suppose I should show you the hidden passageway.”

“By all means,” Ayuda replied, his eyes twinkling.

Odi pushed open the door--a little tentatively, it seemed to Ayuda, as though he were entering forbidden territory--and the look on the boy’s face confirmed his suspicions that the bodyguard and the cook were “involved.” At first, Tai looked angry, as though

he were ready to say something, but when he saw Ayuda he quickly put on a mask of composure.

“Sorry to disturb you, Tai,” Odi said, softly, “but this is Ayuda, Iason’s new bodyguard. I wanted to show him the entranceway.”

Tai nodded sharply, turning away without further comment. Ayuda watched the interaction between the two with interest, now convinced that they were lovers engaged in some sort of argument. Odi fumbled with the switch to open the hidden door and Ayuda nodded, impressed. He would not have guessed, had he not been shown, that there was a secret door within the chopping block; in the elevator on the way up to the penthouse, he had been vaguely puzzled about the time it took to move from the previous floor to the penthouse--it had seemed to him somehow longer than the distance between the other floors. Now he knew this had not been his imagination, as Odi revealed that the stairway led to an entire floor beneath the penthouse.

“Very clever,” Ayuda remarked, impressed. “Who designed it?”

“I assume the main architect--Megala Chi,” Odi replied, shrugging. “But I really don’t know.”

“Where are the other secret doors?”

Now Odi smiled. “How do you know there are others?”

Ayuda smiled. “Where there’s one, there’s bound to be more.”

Odi laughed. “Well, you happen to be right. There’s one more that I know of, that leads to the observatory.”

Ayuda suspected that, in fact, the penthouse was full of surprises and secret passageways, and he looked forward to discovering the others. It was something of a game to him, uncovering all that was hidden. Aroguay, his teacher, had always told him that way to gain a master’s respect was to show him you could not be fooled.

They were approaching the library, and Ayuda saw the great Blondie within, sitting, legs crossed, in a big chair, reading from a small book. He startled when Odi approached, closing the book as though he did not want to risk the contents being observed. Ayuda was a bit surprised to see him up close; he had not expected him to

be wearing spectacles, nor was he quite prepared for Iason's extraordinary, breathtaking beauty.

"Sorry to disturb you, Sir," Odi said, "but this is Ayuda. He'll be your personal bodyguard."

"Ah." Iason removed his spectacles, nodding as he looked the bodyguard over. "Very good." Ayuda was exactly what he'd hoped for; he wanted his personal bodyguard to seem formidable and yet pleasantly attractive.

"He's acceptable, then?"

"He'll do nicely." Iason offered him a small smile, but Ayuda could tell that the Blondie's thoughts were somewhere else entirely. He had a hunch it had something to do with the book he held, and he wondered what its contents were.

"I'm showing him around now, and then I'll key in his clearances."

Iason nodded, seeming a bit anxious for Odi to leave.

"Then, we'll leave you."

"If you see Toma, please have him bring me some wine," Iason replied, putting his spectacles back on.

"Yes, Sir."

Odi immediately changed his planned tour route to find Toma, knowing that Iason did not like to be kept waiting. As they moved into the guest wing, they saw Toma, just about to enter his room.

"Sir Iason was asking for you," Odi said. "He wants some wine."

Eyes wide, Toma nodded. A bit of dirt was smeared on his cheek; in one hand he clutched a moonflower.

"You might want to wash your face," Odi added, in a lower voice.

Ayuda studied this interchange with interest, immediately guessing that Toma and Odi were also somehow involved. It was apparent, to him anyway, that the boy had been crying; and the way he looked at Odi left no doubt in his mind that Toma was smitten with the great bodyguard.

“This is the new bodyguard, Ayuda. And this is Toma, Master Iason’s Furniture. He’s also fairly new here.”

Ayuda smiled at Toma, rather taken with his looks; his light blue hair glittered with streaks of silver and blue, and he had a boyish air about him that seemed charming. Also he could not help but be affected by the tears still glimmering in Toma’s eyes; Ayuda had a soft spot for tears, though he would never let anyone know it.

“A red-eyed moonflower,” Ayuda remarked. “Those are pretty rare, aren’t they?”

Toma nodded, looking up at Ayuda almost fearfully. He’d never seen anyone like him before; he was at least as tall as Master Iason, and much more muscular. Though there was no question the bodyguard was attractive, Toma was much too distracted by Odi to give it much thought.

As Ayuda and Odi walked away, Toma stared after them, then hurried inside to freshen up and attend to Master Iason’s needs.

“Do you have any questions at this point?” Odi asked, as he led Ayuda to the pools.

“Actually, yes. The chef--Tai--he’s Aristian?”

Odi visibly flinched at the mention of his name, but quickly recovered. “Yes?”

“Is that going to be a problem? I mean, with the Commander?”

Odi’s brow furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, because of the Aristian massacre?”

Now Odi fell silent, stopping dead in his tracks. “Massacre?”

“You don’t know what I’m referring to?”

Odi sighed, closing his eyes. “I knew this was all out of my league. No. I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“The Aristian massacre took place a few years ago, when the Commander first began his campaigns. They stopped on Aristia to relax, and his men decided to do some pillaging. They sacked an entire village before Khosi finally put a halt to it. Several hundred people were killed, including children. Khosi apologized formally to the Prince for his men’s actions and the Prince allowed him to go without any form of retribution. The Aristians were very angry

about this; rumor has it Khosi seduced the Prince to gain his support.”

Annoyed that Tai had never mentioned this to him, Odi shook his head. “I had no clue about this. But I do know that Tai is a cousin of the Prince.”

“A cousin?” Ayuda found this surprising, given the boy’s current occupation. “Then, perhaps that will not be a problem.”

“We’d better discuss the matter with Tai, just in case. And we’ll need to alert Iason.”

Ayuda nodded.

“Thank goodness you knew something about this. I would hate for there to have been any surprises tomorrow.”

“Yes. As long as Tai’s origins are including in the debriefing, we should be fine.”

“You’ve dealt with dignitaries before, if I’m not mistaken?”

“Oh yes. While I worked in Urus, mostly.”

“Good.”

They made their way back to the kitchen area, and this time Odi was not hesitant about entering Tai’s domain.

Surprised, Tai looked up, freezing when he saw Odi’s expression.

“I would have thought you’d have told me about the massacre, Tai.”

Now Tai looked a little uncomfortable. “I wasn’t sure what to say.”

“How about: Commander Khosi massacred a few hundred Aristian a few years ago?”

“I’m sorry. I considered saying something, but it didn’t really involve me. I heard about it, of course, and knew that the Commander had come to visit my cousin afterward. It was horrible and all, but...I guess I was too focused on my own concerns at the time.”

“I would have thought,” Odi continued, lowering his voice a bit, “that you would have at least told me.”

“I guess I should have,” Tai replied, looking nervously at Ayuda.

“Sir Iason won’t be happy that you didn’t come forward with this information,” Odi warned. “You’re probably in for some punishment.”

Nodding, Tai bowed his head, twisting his shirt nervously in his hands.

“We’re going to tell him now. You might as well come with us.”

Sighing, Tai followed Odi out of the kitchen. The three of them made their way silently to the library, where Master Iason was still absorbed in Yousi’s logs.

Once again, the Blondie startled at their approach, quickly closing the book.

“I’m sorry to disturb you again, Sir, but Ayuda’s just informed me of an event of some importance that I knew nothing about, which took place on Aristia a few years ago, when the Commander was there. A massacre, instigated by the Commander’s men.”

As soon as Odi said these words, Iason suddenly realized what he was speaking about; he had a vague memory of the massacre, although he was unaware of the details, nor did he realize the Commander had been involved. It had occurred in the days before Khosi’s rise to power and his subsequent intergalactic fame.

He looked at Tai, who blushed furiously.

“Why did you not mention something about this, Tai?” Iason demanded.

“I should have. But it didn’t really concern me....so, I didn’t think it mattered.”

“Nonsense. You know perfectly well that as soon as the Commander or his guards realized you were Aristian, there would be trouble,” Iason scolded.

Tai nodded, too terrified to reply.

“You will keep nothing of this consequence from me in the future, Tai. Is that understood?”

“Yes, Sir,” Tai whispered.

Now Iason sighed, removing his spectacles and rubbing his eyes. “You will have to be punished, Tai.”

Tai was silent, waiting anxiously.

At that moment, Katze returned from the hospital, having spent a good portion of the day with Daryl.

“Odi, have Katze step in here,” Iason said, quietly.

Odi poked his head out of the library, catching Katze’s notice. “Master Iason wants to see you.”

Katze nodded, hoping he wasn’t in for a lecture for staying away too long. When he saw the assembly in the library, he frowned, wondering what was up.

“Katze. Unfortunately, Tai is to be punished. I’ll have you administer the punishment. Give him...nine strikes with your taming stick. Exposed.”

Now Katze turned to Tai, feeling some pity for the boy, as frightened as he looked. Nine strikes wasn’t terribly harsh, but he knew Tai wouldn’t like it. He whipped out his taming stick, nodding toward the library desk.

“Palms face down on the desk, Tai. Lower your pants.”

Tai obeyed, his hands shaking as he exposed himself and then stood, waiting.

The strikes came hard and fast; Katze thought it best to end it as quickly as possible. Tai greeted each strike with a pathetic, choked yelp, struggling to hold back his tears. When it was over, he continued to stand for a moment, unable to bend down to raise his pants. Katze helped him with this, resting his hand on Tai’s shoulder in a reassuring way.

“I hope you have learned from this, Tai, that in my household I am to be apprised of all matters of any weight,” Iason said.

Tai nodded, wiping a tear from his face.

“You may go.”

Tai turned to leave, his gaze for a moment locked with Odi’s, who looked at him with pity. Tai returned his stare darkly, refusing to accept the bodyguard’s sympathy. He left, brushing past him without a single word.

* * *

It was late by the time Iason finally went to bed, creeping into the bedroom where Riki already lay sprawled, fast asleep. He was completely naked, the sheets coiled impossibly around his body, one arm flung over his head, his legs spread wide, taking up as much space in the bed as was possible.

Iason smiled as he undressed, unable to help himself; he loved to watch Riki sleep, adoring the way his pet seemed so vulnerable and boyish, and treasuring the tiny grunts and vocalizations he made.

As he scooted into bed next to him, Iason couldn't resist nuzzling up to him a bit; Riki sighed and rolled onto his side, away from him, and the Blondie immediately took advantage of his pet's inviting backside, snuggling up close. Predictably, Iason became aroused by Riki's warm, naked flesh pressed against his own; his erection developed quickly, twitching against the mongrel's buttocks as Iason struggled to rein in his desire.

He suddenly felt overcome with need; his thighs ached with it, and without even meaning to he began gently thrusting up against his pet, a low moan escaping him.

"Help. I'm being molested by a horny Blondie," Riki groaned, his voice thick and raspy with sleep.

"Oh, Riki," Iason breathed, kissing the back of his neck urgently, his hands sliding down his warm body.

Riki sighed. "You might as well fuck me. Otherwise neither of us is getting any sleep."

This proclamation, delivered with mongrelesque enthusiasm, was accepted by Iason as invitation enough; he immediately poured a generous quantity of oil onto his stiffened member, trembling as he prepared himself. It had been several days since they'd engaged in coital congress, and Iason found that he was almost frantic for release.

He slipped a well-oiled finger into Riki's sanctum, trying to ready his pet for his entrance; it was always the case that when several days passed without penetration, Riki grew tighter. Although he had not intended to trouble his pet with sexual

requests while he was yet ill, he found that his lust was nearly uncontainable; he wanted Riki so terribly that he was literally shaking.

“Bloody hell. Did you get into the cider again?” Riki asked, as Iason covered his backside with kisses and teasing bites, his fingers sliding everywhere the Blondie could reach.

“I need you, Riki,” Iason whispered.

“Yeah, I got that much. Well, hurry up then, so I can get back to sleep.”

Iason pulled his pet closer, nuzzling against his cheek. “I shall go precisely as fast or slow as I want,” he whispered in his ear.

“Whatever,” Riki sighed. “It’s always gotta be your way, doesn’t it?”

“Yes,” Iason replied. “Because...I am your master.”

“Yeah, I know.” Riki closed his eyes, starting to enjoy Iason’s warmth and all his attention, despite the fact that he was still feeling rather ill and not the slightest bit sexually aroused. “You don’t have to remind me every bloody day. You’re always like, You’re my pet, Riki or I am your master, like I don’t freaking already know that. But you keep on telling me, over and over.”

“I’ll tell you as many times as I need to, until you acknowledge my authority.”

Riki laughed. “Acknowledge your authority. What the fuck does that mean...you own me! What other acknowledgement do you need?”

“I want you to submit to me, in all things.”

“No you don’t,” Riki countered, reaching back to play with Iason’s long, soft hair. “Then I’d be just like all the other mindless sex-droids that are up for auction every week. You like me just the way I am--a vulgar, rebellious mongrel. Because you’re a deviant. And that’s why I like you.”

Now Iason smiled, seeing the truth in his pet’s observation. “Like? What happened to love, Riki?”

“Are you going to fuck me or what?” Riki demanded, evasively.

“Oh yes,” Iason whispered. “But first I want you to answer me. Do you love me, Riki?”

“How about you answer me first? Do you love me?”

Iason suddenly pulled Riki so close that he winced. “I can’t breathe!”

“Yes, Riki. I love you, heart and body.”

“But not soul?” came the mongrel’s impish reply.

“If I had a soul, I would love you with that as well.”

“Well, I love you with my heart, body, and my soul, even though you’re a big soulless Blondie.”

“Do you?” Iason replied, smiling. “Do you love me so, Riki?”

“Bloody hell. I just said so, didn’t I? What is it with you and--ow!” Distracted by the pain of penetration, Riki fell silent, wincing and groaning as Iason slowly entered.

“Oh love,” the Blondie gasped, his eyes rolling back. “You feel exquisite.”

“Yeah well...you feel like a gigantic horse cock, as usual.”

“Tell me you love me again,” Iason demanded, his hands wildly roaming his pet’s body as he slowly thrust from behind.

“That gets you off, I guess. Well, then. I love you.”

“Say it again,” the Blondie whispered, urgently. “Say my name.”

“I love you, Iason.”

“Again. This time, say Master.”

“Oh come on! I already told you I loved you a billion freaking times!”

“Please,” Iason pleaded.

Now Riki smiled, relenting. “I love it when you beg. All right, then. I love you, Master.”

The Blondie reacted to this by thrusting harder, groaning as he sunk into his pet’s depths.

“Take it easy,” Riki grumbled. “I won’t be able to move tomorrow if you don’t ease up.”

Ignoring this, Iason became even more insistent, fucking him harder as his hands roamed wildly up and down Riki’s body. He

began kissing, and then biting, the mongrel's shoulder, eliciting a yelp of surprise from pet.

"Ow! What...why are you such a sex demon tonight?" Riki gasped, his cock twitching and awakening from Iason's intoxicating lovemaking.

"Because I have not had you in several days."

Although Iason's hands freely roamed the terrain of Riki's body, twisting his nipples and tracing the hollow of his pelvic bone, he had not touched his pet's organ; Riki now found this unbearable and, with bold initiative, grabbed the Blondie's hand and guided him to his growing erection.

Iason was unusually excited by this. "Is this what you want?" he whispered, gliding his still-oiled hand the length of his pet's shaft. He nibbled on Riki's earlobe as he began pleasuring him with slow, firm strokes.

"Yes," Riki groaned, shivering.

"Like this?" Iason increased the cadence of his pump, eliciting a pleased gasp from his pet.

"Fuck yeah! Like that! Keep doing that!"

"Oh, Riki," Iason breathed, beside himself with pleasure. Riki's moans and gasps, coupled with the delicious perfection of his fuck--his swollen cock sliding into his pet's tight sanctum with almost desperate thrusts--brought him quickly to the brink; when the mongrel began groaning his release, he followed suit. Gasping erratically as he ejaculated, eyes rolled back, he rode the swells of his pleasure until the waves receded and ceased.

Iason withdrew, rolling onto his back and pulling Riki to him. His pet snuggled up to him, smiling.

"Holy fuck," Riki exclaimed. "That was wild. Maybe we should skip a few days now and then, if it feels like that."

Although Iason knew this was a good suggestion, he could not bear the thought of sacrificing his daily congress with his pet, even for the otherwise worthy goal of delayed gratification.

"Perhaps," he whispered. "But I need to be with you, every day, Riki."

“Yeah, I know,” Riki smiled. “You can’t make it through the day with a good fuck, can you? So what did you do before you found me? Or did you fuck your other pets, too?”

Iason thought about this for a moment, remembering the years of celibacy after he and Raoul had fallen out, and the many pets that had come and gone in his household. Although he always enjoyed watching his pets, he had quickly tired of their scripted performances and predictable behavior and had gone through them at a ridiculously accelerated rate, typically acquiring a new pet every few months. He’d never once even contemplated taking a pet; the very thought was inconceivable. It was only when Riki came into his household that he began to fantasize the unthinkable--sexual congress with a pet.

“No,” Iason replied. “I have told you before. You were the first.”

“I guess that’s why you’re so into the whole watching thing,” Riki hypothesized. “Especially when I first came here. You always made me jerk off for you.”

Iason smiled, remembering. He’d found Riki to be the most exciting pet he’d ever viewed. Perhaps because the mongrel had never been trained to be a pet, his performances--however reluctant-- were nevertheless real, and the Blondie had taken great pleasure in watching him. And almost immediately, he had begun to wonder what it would be like to take his pet.

“Iason?”

“Yes, love?”

“Did you mean it when you said you’d never sell me?”

“Oh Riki,” Iason whispered, pulling him close. “I would sooner give my own life than give you up.”

Riki smiled at this answer, closing his eyes. With that, master and pet fell asleep, entangled in one another’s arms.

* * *

Omaki had just returned home from driving Yousi back to his home in Eos; it had been a perplexing trip, punctuated every few

minutes by sudden exclamations and pronouncements from Yousi as new memories emerged in his awareness, sprouting up and blossoming quickly in the fertile terrain of his regenerating mind.

"That's where Heiku had his accident," he yelled at one point, nearly causing Omaki to share a similar fate.

"Please, Yousi," he scolded, "you mustn't startle me like that. You'll get us both killed."

"I'm sorry. But...I'm right, aren't I?"

Omaki nodded. "Yes."

He tried not to think about that nightmarish day, when Heiku had lost his arm in a horrific vehicular accident while trying to save the passengers in the other vehicle. The car had flipped precariously onto its side, and a boy was pinned beneath it, tangled in the rubble. Heiku attempted to pull him out but as he did so, the vehicle shifted and fell, crushing the boy and severing Heiku's arm.

The accident had happened about five years after they had left the Academy. The three of them-- Heiku, Omaki and Yousi--had been inseparable; Heiku's accident was a devastating blow to them all. Particularly because at the time, Yousi and Heiku had just become intimate; at least, Omaki suspected as much. Yousi had nearly gone out of his mind with worry when Heiku's condition was critical and his outlook uncertain. But Heiku, like all Blondies, was exceptionally strong, and he recovered completely. In fact, Heiku had been quite pleased with his new bionic arm, which, as a surgeon, afforded him with precision and utility that was incomparable. His limb was computerized and fully programmable, allowing him to direct a laser beam from the tip of his finger. Surgeon and tool were thus one, and this was why Heiku was the greatest surgeon Tanagura--or Amoi, for that matter--had ever known.

Omaki smiled, remembering Heiku's excitement over his prosthesis.

"What is so funny?" Yousi demanded, feeling a bit disturbed by the memory of Heiku's accident.

“I was just remembering how Heiku was so proud of that blasted arm,” Omaki laughed.

Yousi smiled, nodding. “Yes! I remember that.” He fell silent for a moment, looking a bit perplexed.

“Is something wrong?”

Yousi shook his head, puzzling over Heiku. There was something about him. He’d always felt it, whenever the Blondie had come into his shop. Heiku had always been especially kind to him, he remembered, not like some other Blondies who snapped at him when he made a mistake, or when he was slow--which was most of the time. No, Heiku had always encouraged him. “Don’t rush,” he would say, soothingly, as Yousi tried, with trembling hands, to enter in the purchase codes. Or, “You’re doing just fine, Yousi. Don’t be afraid.”

But it was more than that. Yousi trembled when Heiku was near, it was true; but it wasn’t exactly that he was frightened of the Blondie. There was just something about him; a familiarity that he found comforting and at the same time disconcerting.

Omaki studied him, worried. “You should rest when you get back. Forget about the bondage shop for a few days; let your attendants manage it.”

“I’ll let my attendants manage it,” Yousi repeated, almost robotically, suddenly feeling excessively tired. He closed his eyes, falling asleep almost right away. Omaki observed him as he drove, puzzling over what was happening to his old friend. And on the way back he began to worry about what would happen, should Jupiter learn of Yousi’s returning memories. He had no doubt that Yousi would be forced to submit to a second modification, and he could not bear the thought of losing his old friend again.

All their talk of Heiku had brought another thought into his mind; he realized that he should contact Heiku and tell him what was happening to Yousi. And perhaps Heiku, as a physician, could better understand the situation, and how modified neuronal tissue could regenerate.

Now, back at the Tower, he was greeted by Ru, Enyu, and Kahlan as he entered. He frowned, looking around. "Where's Aki?" Typically the boy came running as soon as Omaki stepped foot into the house.

"He's in his room," Ru answered. "He's been there all day."

"All day?"

Worried, the Blondie hurried to Aki's room, opening the door to find the boy sitting on the floor, crying.

He crouched down next to him. "What's all this about?" he whispered. "What's wrong, Aki?"

"I don't want to go away," Aki answered, tears streaming down his face.

"Come here, my little love." Omaki scooped him up and sat down on the bed, holding him on his lap. "Now, I don't want you to go away either. But we don't have a choice. And remember, I will come and see you as often as you would like. Every day, if you prefer."

"Yes," Aki sniffed, "come every day."

"Then it's settled. I will come and see you every day. Iason will be quite sick of me." Omaki kissed Aki on the cheek. "Maybe he'll even punish me, for coming over so often."

This elicited a giggle from Aki as he imagined his master being punished.

"Oh, you find that funny, do you?" Omaki teased. "Do you know what happens to little boys who laugh at their masters being punished?"

Aki shook his head, eyes wide.

"They get kissed and kissed, and kissed some more."

The boy giggled as Omaki began kissing him all over his face and neck.

"It tickles!" he squealed. "Help! I'm being kissed to death!"

"Very well, if you insist, I will stop kissing you. Oh, but it is very very tempting with such a cute little boy upon my lap."

"I'm not a little boy," Aki protested, indignant. "I'll be NINE on Astrajia's Rest!" He punctuated this statement by pointing his

finger to the ceiling, as though conveying with this dramatic gesture the significance of having attained nine years.

“Ah yes. You’re quite right. How wrong of me not to acknowledge your non-littleboyness.”

“Yousi says that nine is an important year,” Aki continued, excited.

“That’s true. You’ll receive an official notification from Jupiter, acknowledging your existence and confirming your citizenship.”

“But Jupiter already knows about me because she won’t let me stay with you.”

Omaki smiled. “Yes. It is a mere formality.”

“What’s a mirror morphality?”

“A mere formality. It just means, Aki, that even though Jupiter knows about the birth of every citizen, she does not officially recognize a child until he has reached nine years.”

“But why?”

Omaki shook his head. “To be honest, I don’t know. It’s just how it’s always been done.”

“Will she send me a private message?” Aki asked, eyes wide.

“You’ll receive several things. Your citizenship certificate and identification chips, and a cellpad with a holographic greeting from Jupiter. But the greeting will only play one time.”

“Oh,” Aki replied, disappointed. “Why?”

“Again, I don’t know. Jupiter is very careful about limiting access to her image.”

“It’s probably because it makes her seem more special if you never see her,” Aki hypothesized.

“That’s very clever, Aki,” Omaki whispered. “You’re a very smart boy.”

“So then the day after that...is when I’m leaving?”

“Yes. But don’t forget, there’s a party waiting for you. And Commander Khosi may be there.”

“And I can feed the fish,” Aki added.

“There’s something else you should know about Iason’s penthouse,” Omaki whispered.

“What?” Aki whispered back.

“It has secret passageways.”

“Secret passages!” Aki yelled, beside himself with excitement.

“You mean like the one...with the curly stairs?”

“Ah. Yes. The door to the observatory. But there are others as well.”

“How many?”

“I’m not sure of the exact number, but there are at least two that I know of.”

“How do you know, if it’s a secret?” Aki demanded, suspicious.

“I know because the Blondie who designed the tower is a friend of mine. He told me.” In fact, Omaki had garnered this information one night, years earlier, when he and Megala had slept together.

For Aki, the revelation of these secret passages almost made up for the penthouse’s principle defect--an egregious paucity of slides. His master’s promise to visit him every day was also reassuring, and the prospect of meeting Commander Khosi now resumed its prominent position in assuaging his anxieties about the move.

“Do you suppose there is any cake left?” Omaki whispered.

“Let’s find out!” Aki jumped off his lap, but was quickly seized by his master.

“Wait just a minute. I need one more kiss.” With that, Omaki kissed the top of the boy’s head, then released him, smiling.

Aki ran out of his room and to the kitchen, his arrival greeted with relief by the members of the household, who had all been worried about him.

“Master says I can have some cake!” he yelled.

Ru and Kahlan exchanged a look, smiling.

“Did he, now? But...suppose it’s all gone?”

“Who ate it, then?” Aki demanded.

“Let’s see.” Ru opened the cake tin, revealing the fact that plenty of the wanted dessert remained.

“There’s lots of cake!” Aki announced, happily.

“So it seems.” Ru prepared a piece for the boy, then turned to Kahlan. “Would you like some?”

“No,” Kahlan laughed. “I already had three pieces. It was delicious, though.”

“I wonder if Commander Khosi likes cake.” Aki said, with a mouth full of the dessert.

“He is a very silly commander, if he doesn’t,” Kahlan replied. “Though I don’t imagine we’ll ever know.”

“I’ll ask him,” Aki announced.

Kahlan laughed at this. “I’m sure you will.”

Aki nodded. “I will. When I meet him.”

“I have no doubt you will meet him one day, Commander Aki,” Kahlan laughed.

“I’m meeting him on Jupiter’s Eve!”

“I see.”

“Actually, he is,” Ru whispered. “The Commander is staying with Iason Mink.”

“What?” Kahlan looked startled with this news, his face growing pale.

Enyu nodded. “Yes, it’s true.”

“Kahlan. What’s wrong?” Ru peered at the boy, concerned.

Kahlan shook his head. Up until that point, he had managed to remain unaffected about any talk of Commander Khosi. He’d grown accustomed, over the past two years, to hearing the Commander’s name mentioned, and he’d learned to detach himself from the situation, so that the turmoil of emotions buried within would not be released from imprisonment. For his own sanity, he could not bear to think of the Commander as a real person; he was an abstract idea--a story--a shifting dream.

But now, to know that the Commander was so close to him, in the flesh, sent chills through his body.

Ru put his hand on Kahlan’s shoulder. “Kahlan. You look ill.”

“I need some fresh air.”

Omaki entered the kitchen and, seeing Aki with chocolate on his face, smiled. “I see you found the cake.”

“I already ate it,” Aki admitted.

Omaki laughed. "Well then, go wash your face, and then you may play."

Aki answered this by sliding off his chair and running to the bath hall.

The Blondie then turned his attention to Enyu, a smile tugging at his mouth. "Pet. Come with me."

Excited, Enyu followed his master, knowing immediately from Omaki's look what he had in mind.

"Come on," Ru urged, helping Kahlan to his feet. "Let's go out to the balcony."

Nodding, Kahlan followed him outside into the cold night.

"It's so cold here," he mumbled, sadly.

"I'll go get your coat," Ru replied.

"No. Don't go."

"Then," Ru whispered, putting his arms around Kahlan from behind. "Does this help?"

"Yes," Kahlan admitted, enjoying Ru's warm embrace. It seemed perfectly natural that they should be thus, snuggling together under the winter stars.

"So...what's wrong?"

Kahlan sighed. "I told you...about what happened to my family."

"Yes?"

"Well, they were killed by Commander Khosi's men. And not just them. Lots of other families, too."

"Shit." Now Ru understood, and he pulled Kahlan against him, holding him even tighter. "I'm trying to think of what to say, but I don't know what I should say," he confessed.

"You don't have to say anything. It's not like I'm going to do anything. It's just...hard."

"What do you mean, do anything?"

"I mean like...get revenge."

"Oh. You...don't want to avenge your family?"

"No. It would only cause more pain and suffering. If I were able to kill the Commander--which I doubt I could ever manage,

anyway--it would only hurt the people who love him, people who haven't done anything wrong. Anyway it was his men who did the killing, and I'll never know who they were."

Ru listened, smiling. "You're a good person, Kahlan."

"Not really. I just don't like violence."

"Me either."

"Not like my friend, Wyn."

"Wyn?"

"Wyn Quantum. He...his family was killed, too. Only he vowed to never rest until he avenged them. But when I wouldn't join him, we had a falling out."

"That's too bad."

Kahlan nodded. "Yeah. Especially because...I really understood his pain." He laughed, shaking his head. "He was something else."

Now Ru felt a small stab of jealousy. "You...loved him, I think?"

"Yes. I mean...not the way you're thinking. I loved him as a friend." He smiled. "Funny. He was the only Aristian ever born with blonde hair."

"That's peculiar," Ru remarked.

Kahlan felt silent. Something about Ru's arms around him...made him feel strange. In a good way. He liked the way Ru smelled, and suddenly he had an overwhelming desire to kiss him.

"Ru?"

"Yeah?"

"I like being together like this."

"Me, too."

"Can I kiss you?"

"Yes."

Now Kahlan turned around, shivering both from the cold and from nervousness, and slowly leaned forward to press his lips against Ru's, softly.

He'd never kissed anyone before, nor had Ru ever been kissed. It was a brief kiss of innocence, sweet and perfect in its purity. He pulled away, his heart pounding.

"I really wanted to do that."

“I...really wanted you to,” Ru admitted.

“Yeah?”

Ru nodded. “I like you, Kahlan.”

Kahlan smiled. “I like you, Ru. And...thanks. For this. But...let’s go back inside now before we freeze to death.”

Laughing, the boys went back into the inviting warmth of Omaki’s home, each of them tingling from their first kiss.

The Commander Cometh

“You’ll wear this, Riki.” Iason dropped a small chain mail outfit onto the bed as soon as the mongrel woke up. “Go take a shower and make yourself presentable.”

The mongrel looked at his proposed attire, then picked it up, his eyes narrowing.

“You’ve got to be bloody kidding.”

“Don’t be difficult today, Riki. Remember you have yet to be punished.”

“Why don’t I just go naked if you’re so bent on showing me off?”

“Very well, if that’s your preference.”

“Well, I guess I could wear it,” Riki replied, grumpily, realizing some coverage was better than none. “If you want me to.”

Iason smiled. “Yes. That is what I want. Obey me today, Riki. I expect you to address me properly and behave in a manner befitting of a pet.”

“How am I supposed to know what’s befitting to a pet when I never attended the blasted Pet Academy?” Riki grumbled.

“Riki. I have been taming you for over two years. You know what I expect from you.”

“So that’s what you’ve been trying to do,” Riki shot back. “I just thought you were being a sadistic fuck. Here’s a news bulletin: I’m untamable.”

Now Iason reached down, taking hold of Riki’s chin firmly as he bent down to look him full in the face.

“Oh, I’ll tame you. No matter how long it takes, nor what I’m compelled to do. We can take the short route, or the long, painful one. Both ways lead to the same place--your submission to me. I’ll let you decide which course we’ll take.” Iason spoke softly, but firmly, the intensity in his eyes conveying his sincerity on this point.

Riki fell silent, deciding Iason was in full Master mode, which meant his usual teasing and mouthing off wouldn’t be tolerated. After two years, he’d finally learned to read the Blondie and know when he was allowed his usual freedoms of speech and manner, and when he was expected to conform to the demeanor of a submissive pet.

Iason’s changing moods and the accompanying changes in his permissions had been a source of great mystification and frustration to the street-wise mongrel, who had never encountered anyone with such a complicated repertoire of mind games. Now he’d learned that each of his master’s many faces was connected to a separate template of expected behaviors. Though Riki claimed he could not be tamed, by learning how to read and respond to Iason in ways that involved the least amount of punishment--most of the time--the mongrel had, in fact, already learned exactly what his master wanted him to know.

Iason Mink had almost succeeded in taming Riki.

Almost.

“Whatever,” Riki groaned. “Can I have a smoke please? I’m about to die of the jitters.”

“You may not smoke while you’re still ill,” Iason replied, releasing him. “However, once you’re in better health, I will return your smokes to you. I’ve decided that I’m going to trust you to moderate your own intake. But if you want to keep this privilege, I expect you to cut back on your previous regimen.”

“I will,” Riki promised, thrilled that he would be getting his smoking privileges back, although he was not looking forward to waiting for his next smoke. But, perhaps it was worth it.

He grinned. “Cool.”

Iason nodded, pleased with his reaction. His decision to give Riki his smokes back was in actuality a practical calculation; since he was allowing his pet access to the Saloon, where he could easily acquire smokes from other pets, it did not make sense to keep the restriction in force.

“When are you going to punish me?” Riki asked.

“Since it was the Commander you affronted, I’ll have him decide your punishment.”

“What! He’ll probably have me killed!”

Iason smiled. “Do you really think, Riki, that I would allow an outcome such as that?”

Riki frowned. “I guess not.”

“Now, go clean up and get dressed. When you’re ready, Tai has some food ready for you.”

“Yeah...I’m actually pretty hungry,” Riki replied.

Iason turned and walked off without another word, leaving his pet to stare after him.

Riki shook his head. It had been a long time since he had seen Iason so preoccupied and “stern.” He found that he rather disliked this side of Iason and he was certainly not looking forward to the Commander’s visit. He looked at the chain bikini again and sighed.

“Bloody hell,” he grumbled, making for the bath hall. He dreaded being put in chains again, being manacled to the hall post like some animal. Memories of his early days at the penthouse flooded back; he had hated the way Iason had treated him then, with such contempt. The more he thought about it, the more annoyed he became. All of this was due to the stupid Commander’s visit. And Riki knew he hadn’t been imagining things when he heard Voshka Khosi coming onto Iason. That would be just one more thing he had to deal with today. And he wouldn’t be able to do a thing about it.

All these thoughts began to converge in the poor mongrel’s mind, so that by the time he had cleaned up, he had worked himself into a fervor. When he finally stood before the mirror,

contemplating his scantily clad body in the ridiculously tiny chain-mail briefs, it was just too much.

“No fucking way,” he announced, angrily removing them and then looking around, trying to decide what to do with them. Spying a potted plant, he managed to hide the offending garment within the leaves. Then, he went back to his room and got dressed. In his choice of clothes—black jeans and a tight black tank.

As he ambled into the hall, he was immediately accosted by Iason.

“Riki. Have you forgotten what I told you to wear?” the Blondie demanded, from the comfort of his chair where he sat, reading the Tanagura Daily Report.

“I’m not wearing that,” Riki replied, sitting down at the table and starting to eat as though nothing was wrong. “I’m wearing this.”

For a moment Iason was quiet. Riki knew this quiet—this was Iason’s pre-rage quiet. A very unwelcome sort of quiet—one might say, a disquieting sort of quiet. A shiver ran down his back but he tried to maintain his composure, slowly chomping on a piece of toast.

“Go get dressed NOW,” Iason whispered, his voice betraying his anger despite its softness.

“Fuck off.”

As soon as he said it, Riki knew it was a mistake. Iason stood up, and in a few quick strides reached the table, yanking his pet to his feet. “How dare you,” he hissed. “It seems you want punished this morning. You couldn’t wait for the Commander’s visit, then?”

“Ow,” Riki complained, swatting at Iason’s firm grip on the back of his shirt. “You’re fucking choking me.”

“You WILL obey me, Riki.”

“Dammit Iason. Quit being such an asshole,” Riki snapped, suddenly—amazingly—managing to wriggle loose from his grasp. Taking advantage of his opportunity, Riki took a swing and managed to clip Iason’s arm—rather hard. It was the first time the mongrel had ever struck his master, and for a moment Iason and Riki simply stared at one another. Riki, realizing his grave error,

struck out again, desperately, but this time Iason grabbed his wrist and gripped him so tightly that the mongrel cried out in agony.

“You’ll regret that,” Iason warned, his voice betraying his rage.

Keeping a firm hold on Riki’s wrist, Iason proceeded to drag him toward the bedroom.

“You’re cutting off my circulation—ow!” Riki complained.

“Save your voice,” Iason advised. “You’ll be screaming soon enough.”

“You’re—overreacting! I was just...fucking around!”

Ignoring this, Iason made for his dresser, where he retrieved a set of manacles from one of the drawers. Throwing Riki facedown onto the bed, he slammed one wrist into a manacle, attaching it to one of the bedposts, then the second wrist to the second post.

“All right, I’ll wear it,” Riki tried, a bit unnerved by Iason’s silent agenda.

“Yes you will. But that won’t save you from punishment, Riki.”

“Aw fuck,” Riki groaned.

Now Iason picked out a dagger, holding it up for Riki to see as he flipped the laser blade on.

“Shit,” Riki gasped. “What are you going to do with...that?” He struggled to look behind him but was unable to see what Iason was up to. The Blondie took the knife and, with deliberate slowness, cut Riki’s pants from his body.

Riki found this rather frightening. “I said I’d wear it,” he tried again.

Now Riki’s ass was bare, the remnants of his clothes lying pathetically by his legs. Iason unbuckled his belt, whipping it out with a slight hissing sound.

“It seems I’m going to have to teach you once and for all who is Master,” Iason whispered. “Are you ready to be punished, Riki?”

“Not really,” the mongrel replied, struggling futilely against his manacles.

“Then, why didn’t you obey me earlier?”

“Because I hate that...little outfit! It’s so bloody demeaning!”

“Whether you hate it or not is of no importance. I told you to wear it. That is all that matters.”

“I’d like to see you wear it,” Riki grumbled.

Iason answered that by unleashing a series of punishing strikes on the mongrel’s backside that left him squirming and whimpering within minutes. “Still feeling defiant?” Iason asked, now kneeling on the bed next to him, one hand on Riki’s back as his arm came down mercilessly and fast on his pet’s bare buttocks. “How dare you strike me, Riki!”

“Well fuck! You do it all the time,” Riki managed to choke out, immediately regretting this. He yelped like a puppy as Iason proceeded to rain down strike after strike, the Blondie’s anger making him even more forceful.

“How many times must I tell you,” Iason hissed, “that I am your Master?”

“Apparently a fucking trillion,” Riki shot back, defiantly, miserable but now becoming quite angry. “You tell me every bloody day!”

“And I’ll keep on telling you until I drive that fact into you,” Iason shouted, striking Riki so hard that his skin began immediately welting.

“Fuck! You bloody sadist! You fucker! I hate you!”

The rest of the household was at a standstill, everyone gathering in the hall to see what the commotion was about. Iason had not even closed the bedroom door, the entire spectacle in plain view.

None of them had ever seen Iason quite so angry. They all exchanged looks, worried. This was not an auspicious start to what was a very important day.

Riki’s words, I hate you, seemed to seep into Iason’s heart like acid. Furious, the Blondie flung his belt aside, unfastening his pants and releasing his surprisingly swollen organ. Riki’s punishment had produced a reflex in the Blondie that he now decided to use as a weapon.

With trembling hands he pushed Riki's buttocks apart, and without any preparation whatsoever, entered his pet with such force that the mongrel screamed, sounding almost like an animal.

"I hate you, Iason!" he whimpered, his voice now choked with tears. "I fucking hate you."

"Is that so?" Iason replied, his own wavering voice betraying his emotion. It was the closest the Blondie had ever come to openly weeping. His rage, and sadness, all converged in his physical state, ironically only serving to increase his arousal. And Riki felt perfect, as always.

"Yes," Riki sobbed. "I...hate you. I hate you." But now the mongrel's tone had change, and the Blondie, who now was pressed close against him, immediately picked up on this.

"Do you...hate this?" he whispered, slowing his thrusting a bit and running his hands down Riki's sides.

"Yes," the mongrel lied, refusing to give Iason the satisfaction of knowing he could be aroused after such a punishment.

Iason nuzzled against his cheek, nibbling on his earlobe.

Chills ran the span of Riki's body, but still he resisted warming up to Iason. He was still too angry.

"Get your filthy hands off me," he snarled.

Startled, and hurt, Iason grabbed Riki's hair, pulling his head back. "If one of us is filthy, it's you, mongrel."

Riki was so taken aback by this that he fell silent. Iason had never spoken to him in such a way.

Seeming to sense his pet's deep hurt, Iason softened. "Riki. Why must you...provoke me so?"

Riki didn't answer. Iason tried kissing his neck, sending shivers the length of the mongrel's body. His silence ate at Iason.

"Pet," he whispered, "you forced me to punish you."

Still Riki was silent. He was so deeply wounded from Iason's remark that he simply could not reply.

Now Iason closed his eyes, deciding that it was no use trying to interest Riki; he was going to be difficult. With a few quick strokes,

he released, finding his orgasm rather wanting—not anything close to what he usually experienced.

Quietly he withdrew and then continued to lie on his pet for a few moments.

“Perhaps you’d better wash off now, since I’m so filthy,” Riki remarked, coldly.

Iason sighed. “Oh, Riki. I said that...in anger. Don’t take it to heart.”

“How else should I take it?”

Now Iason got up, fastening his pants and then putting his belt back on. “I’m not going to argue with you anymore,” he stated. “I’ll have Toma and Katze release you. Then you’ll get dressed as I instructed you this morning.”

With that, Iason walked off, leaving Riki to struggle with his emotions.

If one of us is filthy, it’s you, mongrel. The words repeated over and over in his head. He was so upset by it that he hardly noticed when Toma and Katze came into the room.

He did notice the Accelerator, however.

He screamed, cursing and straining against his restraints.

“Sorry, Riki. Iason’s orders,” Katze said, softly, as he continued to apply the Accelerator.

“Fucking prick,” Riki whispered.

“I assume that wasn’t addressed at me, seeing as I lack the equipment to warrant that,” Katze replied, wryly.

“He’s a fucking asshole.”

“You know, if you just obeyed him, you wouldn’t get punished like this all the time. It’s your choice, Riki.”

“What, you’re on his side?” Riki wailed.

“There are no sides, Riki. But he’s the Master. Why can’t you just accept that? You’re fighting a futile battle.”

“I get no sympathy.”

Katze leaned down close to whisper in his ear. “Aww, poor baby. That’s all the sympathy you’ll get from ME. I’m itching to punish

you myself, by the way. You left me in a bind when you ran off the other day.”

“I know. I’m...sorry about that.”

“Hmmm. I wish I could really make you sorry. A good spanking, that’s what you need. Over my knee.”

Riki smiled slightly at this, relaxing a bit. “I’d like to see you try.”

“Don’t mock me. I might just do it one of these days. Next time Iason leaves me in charge, you’d better watch out.”

Toma listened to this exchange through wide eyes, horrified at what Master Iason had done to his pet. His entire backside, from the top of his buttocks to his thighs, was covered in angry welts, the skin broken here and there. He couldn’t believe what he’d just witnessed. Everyone, of course, knew the rumor that Iason took his pet. But to actually see it was another thing altogether. He was still shocked at the size of the Blondie’s organ—he could never have imagined such a thing. No wonder Riki had screamed.

“Let me out of these things, why don’t ya,” Riki growled.

“We’ll set you free. But you’re going to put on the outfit Iason wanted you to wear, like he ordered.”

“Whatever,” Riki sighed. “They’re fucking cutting into my wrists.”

Katze released his left wrist, returning the manacle to the drawer. He knew well where it belonged; Iason had punished him a few times in a similar manner—without the coital encore, of course—in his younger days. At the time Katze had been so smitten with Iason that he had almost enjoyed the punishment. And he would have certainly enjoyed even more intimacy—however punitive—with his Master. But that...would remain his secret.

“Hey. When’s Daryl coming home?”

Katze smiled, amused with Riki’s word choice: home. So. The mongrel finally realized where he belonged.

“Today. I’m going to get him this afternoon, as soon as Iason allows me to go.”

“Cool. I really miss him.”

“So do I.”

Toma stood uncertainly, unsure of what he was expected to do.

“Release that manacle, Toma,” Katze directed, pointing to Riki’s right wrist.

“Oh. All right.” Toma moved to do so, then stopped, puzzled by the device. “How does it unlock?”

“Press the raised button. Then turn the knob counterclockwise.”

Toma did so, and the handcuff sprung open.

“Finally,” Riki grumbled, rubbing his freed wrists. “Those things bloody hurt.”

“Then I suggest you learn how to behave in a manner that won’t give Iason an excuse to use them,” Katze scolded.

Riki snorted at this, climbing off the bad. “I’ve had enough of your reprimands for one day, Katze. How about you shut the fuck up?”

Katze answered this standing up and staring down at Riki sternly, arms crossed on his chest.

“What?” Riki demanded.

“You may have been Riki the Dark in the slums. But here, you’re subject to my authority,” Katze replied, his eyes gleaming a dark amber.

“Shit. What’s gotten into you?”

Now Katze bent forward, looking Riki dead in the eyes. “I was serious what I said before, Riki. I trusted you. You betrayed that trust. Now, you’re going to pay. From now on, as long as you’re in my charge, you’ll do what I say, when I say it.”

“Hmmm.” Now Riki’s gaze shifted to Toma, who watched this interchange, fascinated. “Well...I have to take a piss. So why don’t you get out of the way.” With that, Riki attempted to push Katze aside, but was stopped by the auburn-haired Furniture, who grabbed his wrist and prevented him from moving forward.

“Ow!” Riki tried to break free and found, much to his dismay, that Katze was stronger than he was. This revelation came as a shock; he was definitely getting soft. He stared at Katze in disbelief.

Katze, who had been weight training at the Gymnasium every morning for the past few years, smiled. "Care to rephrase that?"

"Please, would you mind...letting me pass, Katze," Riki growled, trying to hide his mortification.

Katze released him and Riki glowered at him, angry that he had been bested by the Furniture. He would definitely have to do something about it; already the mongrel began to plan out a daily routine to toughen himself up again. Swimming, weight training, calisthenics—Riki was determined not to let Katze humiliate him in such a manner ever again.

"Why's everyone against me?" Riki muttered.

"Because you're a naughty little brat, that's why," Katze replied, swatting Riki's ass as he passed him.

"Dammit, Katze!" Riki howled. "That...fucking hurt!"

"Good."

"What should I...what should I do?" Toma asked, shifting his weight uncertainly.

"Go check on the housekeepers," Katze suggested. "They should be finished with the rooms by now. Make sure they clean the Observatory and start the hot tub."

"I'm about ready to die of starvation," Riki moaned.

"Would you stop whining for five seconds?" Katze snapped. "Go get dressed and then you can eat."

Riki sauntered off, mumbling to himself and rubbing his ass, and Toma and Katze exchanged amused glances.

"Bet you never saw anything quite like that at Xian's estate," Katze said, softly.

Toma shook his head, smiling. "No. Nothing...like that anyway." Of course, Xian had not hesitated to dole out punishment when it was warranted, but never in such a manner. It was almost...barbaric.

"And what goes on here, stays here," Katze warned, his eyebrow arching. "Is that understood?"

"Yes...Sir Katze," Toma answered, nervously.

“You needn’t address me so. Katze is sufficient. In fact, don’t call me Sir. Iason wouldn’t like it.”

“Yes S...Katze.”

“Go check on the housekeepers. Then we’ll see if Tai needs any assistance.”

Iason, meanwhile, had left his bedroom far more shaken up than his cool demeanor would have suggested. The morning had gotten off to a disastrous start; and though he tried to push it from his mind, he kept hearing Riki’s screams, I hate you, playing over and over in a never-ending loop in his thoughts.

“Tai. Go prepare Riki some fresh breakfast. This has gone cold,” he ordered, then left the hall and made for the library, shutting the door behind him.

“Yes, Master,” Tai whispered, watching him with a slight smile. Iason cared that his pet’s food wasn’t hot. After witnessing such a punishment not a few minutes before, Tai found this request rather endearing. It was one among many such small things that the Master did for Riki that the mongrel never even knew about. Though he hardly envied Riki his punishment, he nevertheless wondered what it would be like to have someone care for his comfort so meticulously, with such thoughtfulness and kindness.

He was so lost in thought that for a moment he did not even hear the chime. And then, as it pressed into his awareness, his brow furrowed. The chime. The Aristian chime. An incoming transmission...from Aristia.

He dashed over to the communications center, immediately bringing the sender on screen. He was surprised to see his father staring back at him.

“Father!” he cried, a little fearfully, but also glad to see a familiar face. However, he could tell almost immediately that something was terribly wrong.

“Tai. I see you are well. Unfortunately I have horrendous news.”

“What...is it?” Tai asked, frightened.

The old man shook his head, closing his eyes. "It...is a nightmare. The palace was...invaded. By Wyn and his rebels."

"Wyn?" Tai felt faint, clutching onto the desk as he waited for more information.

"Yes. The prince is dead...and dozens—probably hundreds—more. There are more bodies than there are survivors to burn them. The great hall was covered in blood."

"That's...that's...awful," Tai replied, unable to find the words to express his horror.

"Yes. A terrible thing. And Wyn has made his escape."

"When? When did this...happen?"

Loren paused for a moment, considering. Like most others there, he had slept little in the past few days. "It's been some...three days, I believe."

"But...I heard nothing of it in the Galaxy Report!"

"Ah. Yes. This is all confidential, Tai. We don't want Aristia to appear vulnerable. So we are hiding the matter from the public. Although...I have grave doubts how long this can be kept secret."

"What about...Ulla? Is she?"

Loren shook his head. "I'm sorry. She was killed."

Tai reeled at this news. Ulla—one of his cousins—had been one of his closest companions at the palace. "What about Oma, or Zorsa? Temel?"

"Oma and Temel are fine. Zorsa...didn't make it."

"Oh father," Tai wailed.

"There...is something else, Tai. Your cousin Urik is now on the throne. Which means that I am next in line. And after me... you."

Tai listened to this in disbelief. "What do you mean, next in line?" he asked, stupidly.

His father smiled. "Tai. I see now you were never fated to be a priest. Your destiny is far greater. You'd better start making plans to return to Aristia."

"But...I don't want to go back!" he cried, horrified. Although many would have welcomed such news, Tai had no desire to be saddled with such an immense responsibility. He was content to

live an uncomplicated life—to rule in the kitchen, not rule an entire planet. Tai's cheeks blushed furiously as he stared down at his feet. "I...mean," he stuttered, "That is to say, I don't know anything about...being princes and whatnot. I'm...a simple boy, father. You know this."

"You sell yourself short, Tai. Though your humility may do you good. I'm making arrangements for your return—"

"No. I'm...not going back," Tai announced, firmly. "Not now, anyway."

"You must, Tai. You have a responsibility. You were born to privilege. You always knew this was a possibility."

Tai shook his head. "No. I never for one moment thought it was a possibility! I was one of...countless cousins! I was, what...16 places away from the throne? Father...I'm a cook. That's all I'll ever be. That's all I want to be."

"You can't run away from your duties, Tai."

"I'm not running away. I'm just staying...exactly where I am. Goodbye, father."

With that, Tai disconnected the signal, putting all transmissions from Aristia on permanent block. He knew Master Iason would not be pleased when he discovered what he'd done, but at the moment he simply didn't want to talk to his father any more. His mind was swimming with this impossible news, and as he rushed to the kitchen to prepare Riki's breakfast, he was so preoccupied that he ran smack into Odi, who had been quietly watching him.

"Whoa there," Odi said, gently grabbing him.

"Let me...go," Tai shot back, though a little uncertainly. He found Odi's touch reassuring.

"What's going on, Tai?" Odi asked. "I heard...well, I'm not sure what I heard."

Tai shook his head, trying to fight back his tears.

"I can't...talk about it."

"Tai," Odi whispered, suddenly filled with longing for the boy. Now that he had him in his arms, he didn't want to let him go. "You

don't have to talk about it. Come here." With that he pulled him close and Tai relented, resting his face against the bodyguard's chest. "That's it," Odi encouraged, running his hand through the boy's hair. His own heart was beating fast; he longed to pick Tai up and carry him to his room.

Tai remained in the bodyguard's arms for a few moments, until he heard Toma's voice. Remembering his heartache anew, he pushed Odi away. "Leave me alone," he whispered, making for the kitchen.

For a moment Odi considered honoring the boy's request, but then he changed his mind. He followed Tai into the kitchen and grabbed him from behind.

"I said leave me alone!" Tai shouted.

"No," Odi whispered, pulling him close. "I won't. Because I care too much about you. And because I think we had something really good together. I know I fucked it up, Tai. But...give me another chance. I only care about you."

"I saw you," Tai answered, his voice breaking. "I saw you with him."

"I know," Odi replied, holding him tight and whispering in his ear. "I already told you—that was stupid of me. But it wasn't going any further. I was about to tell him so. I know you probably don't believe that but...it's the truth. And I've been...kicking myself ever since, for being such an idiot. Tai...we don't have to take things to the next level. I know I said that before but...this time I mean it. I just want to be with you. I'll wait, Tai. For as long as you need, I'll wait. I know I was impatient before but...I was just being selfish, and not thinking about what you needed. You need more time. Please...don't shut me out. Give me a second chance."

Tai listened to this, a small sigh escaping his lips. He wanted, more than anything, to be with the strong, gentle bodyguard. He wanted to forgive Odi. He hated conflict of all types, and his argument with Odi was eating away at him. The sixteenth law of Armah was, If friend or enemy asks, from his heart, to be forgiven for his offense against you, you should forgive him. No crime is too

great that cannot be forgiven. In doing so you heal your own heart more than the heart of the offender, for a grudge eats away at the strongest of men, making them weak as children.

“All right,” he answered. “I will...give you another chance.”

“Truly?” Odi was so overjoyed he held Tai a little too tightly, eliciting a yelp of protest.

“Oh, Tai.” Turning him around, Odi pushed the boy back against the wall, looking down into his eyes. “Please...can I kiss you?”

Tai nodded, wanting this very much. Although Odi tried to show restraint, once his lips touched Tai’s, it was as though a torrent was released; he kissed him wildly, passionately, running his hands down his body and grabbing hold of his face as he kissed him. And Tai responded to his kiss, his tongue entangled with Odi’s, his own hands resting firmly on the bodyguard’s tight ass. He found deep comfort in this intimacy, trying to escape the horror of his own thoughts, his mind now reeling with his father’s news.

“Shit,” Odi swore, groaning. “I’m so ready for you, Tai.”

“I’m ready, too,” Tai answered, his cock uncomfortably swollen.

“I wish we could...go somewhere.”

“We can’t,” Tai gasped, turning his head aside as Odi began biting and kissing his throat. “I’ve...got to finish Riki’s breakfast. And I have...a million things to do.”

“I know,” Odi sighed. “As do I. But I’m about to burst.”

“Me, too.”

“I want to ask you, Tai. But I don’t want you to...get angry if I ask.”

“Ask me.”

“Tai...please...come to my bed tonight. We’ll do whatever you want. It will all be...up to you.”

“Then...I’ll come.”

Overjoyed, Odi kissed Tai all over his face, eliciting a giggle from the boy.

“I don’t know how I’m going to wait until tonight,” he whispered.

“Me either. But...you should go now. Master Iason will not be pleased if I don’t finish Riki’s breakfast.”

“All right. I’ll go. I don’t want to but...I’ll go.” Smiling, Odi kissed Tai’s forehead, stroking his cheek with his fingers. “Thank you, Tai. For giving me another chance.”

Tai nodded, pointing to the door. “Now, get out of my kitchen.”

“Yes, your Majesty,” Odi replied, bowing with mock seriousness. At this, Tai seemed to grow pale.

Odi’s brow furrowed. “What? Did I...say something wrong?”

Tai shook his head, regaining his composure. “No. I just remembered...something I must do. Now, get out, or I’ll have to punish you.”

“Ooo. Punish me tonight,” Odi pleaded.

Laughing, Tai pushed the bodyguard out the door.

Odi obeyed, grinning. He was absolutely elated. He couldn’t believe that Tai had truly forgiven him. He made up his mind that he would honor his promises to Tai. And...he should get Tai something, a gift of some kind. He cursed, remembering that there wasn’t much chance of his having the opportunity to do any shopping today. Not with the Commander coming.

“Bloody Commander,” he growled, under his breath.

At that moment, Katze and Toma approached him, heading for the kitchen.

Ignoring Toma completely, Odi turned to Katze.

“Katze...can I talk to you...privately?”

Katze shrugged. “Sure.” He motioned to the balcony. “I could use a smoke.”

“So could I,” Odi agreed.

“Toma, go on in and see if Tai needs any help,” Katze ordered.

Toma nodded, feeling a bit nervous about approaching Tai on his own. The cook had garnered him with nothing but withering looks since the incident with Odi, so much so that Toma had found eating breakfast difficult, a bit worried about what might be in his food.

Katze and Odi went out onto the balcony, both of them commenting on the weather. It was unseasonably warm, and the sky was a deep, impossible blue.

Katze lit up, taking a deep drag. "Fuck," he groaned. "I really needed that."

Odi nodded, in complete agreement. Everyone had been so rushed that there was hardly any time for breaks that morning.

"So...what is it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Are you...still picking up Daryl today?"

"Hopefully," Katze replied. "Once I can convince Iason to let me go."

"Then...I was wondering if you could do me a favor, since I can't get out today. Do you think you could...run an errand for me?"

Katze shrugged. "Probably. Depends on what it is."

"I wanted to...get something for Tai," Odi replied, his voice lowering a bit.

Katze smiled. "I see."

"I'm not sure what to get him, though."

"What's the occasion?"

"It's...sort of a...I fucked up, thank you for forgiving me present."

"Ah. One of those. You need something from the Fuck Up store."

Odi laughed. "Smart ass. Do you have any suggestions?"

Katze thought for a moment, taking another deep drag. "That depends...on how serious the two of you are."

"I'd like to...become more serious. I don't know how serious we are now."

"Then how about a commitment pendant?"

Odi fell silent, considering. He'd never given anyone a commitment pendant before. He'd always rather valued his freedom. But...Tai was different. Still, perhaps it was a bit early for them to commit to exclusivity. Even though, technically, that was exactly what the issue had been with Toma. Tai had expected exclusivity and had become very angry when Odi had kissed Toma.

“You’re not ready,” Katze remarked, after a moment.

“It’s not that. I’m just...actually, I’ve never committed before.”

“Like I said, you’re not ready.”

“I might be ready. And I think Tai is ready.”

“You shouldn’t commit until you’re 100% sure.”

“Then...what else could I give him?”

“Well...he likes cooking so...maybe a holographic cookbook?”

“Maybe,” Odi replied, a little uncertainly.

“Or...a sex toy? There are some really good oils in from Xeron. They have some sort of...stimulant in them...from what I’ve heard, you come impossibly hard practically the moment you lubricate yourself, they’re so powerful. Best for solo voyages, of course.”

“Hmmm. What other toys?”

“Does he have a milker? Those can be fun.”

“I mean...toys for couples.”

“I see,” Katze answered, smiling. “Ah! You fucked up, right? Then...give him something to punish you with.”

Odi smiled at this, enjoying the image of Tai wielding a paddle or a whip. “Like what?”

“How much can you take?”

“I don’t...actually know.”

“Hmmm. Then...perhaps a small hand paddle. And maybe a leash and collar, to show your submission.”

Odi nodded. “Sounds good.”

“You may change your mind, once he’s through with you,” Katze warned, with a half-smile. “Especially if he’s still angry at you.”

“Well...I deserve it.”

“Then, I’ll stop by Yousi’s shop on the way to the hospital.”

“Thanks, Katze.”

Katze nodding, putting out his cigarette and flinging the butt over the ledge. “You probably won’t be thanking me after you get your ass whacked raw.”

Odi laughed, and the two of them went back inside.

Meanwhile, Toma had quietly entered the kitchen, startling Tai when he finally noticed him.

"You scared me!" Tai scolded, holding his chest.

"Sorry. I didn't want to...bother you. But Katze wanted me to ask if you needed some help."

"No...actually, yes! I have a little emergency here," Tai wailed, pointing to the beverage dispenser. "It's broken! It won't make ice! What am I going to do?"

Toma stared at the device for a moment. "Well...you could make it by hand," he suggested. "The old-fashioned way, I mean."

"That's true," Tai replied, relieved. "Of course. Why didn't I think of that? We'll just...put several containers of water in the freezer and then chip off ice as we need it."

Toma nodded.

"Here," Tai dug through a cabinet and tossed some empty containers to him. "Fill these up with water. Wait! Use peach water. That will look prettier. I've got to...check on the bird."

"It smells really good," Toma replied, happy that Tai no longer seemed upset with him. "What kind of bird is it?"

"An Aristian pheasant, with spiced stuffing."

"Mmmm. Sounds delicious."

The two of them worked together happily. Although neither one of them spoke of the incident with Odi, there was an understanding between them that the episode was no longer an issue.

"The new bodyguard—Ayuda—was asking about you," Tai mentioned, at one point.

"He was?" Surprised, Toma froze, Ayuda's face now pressing into his consciousness. "What was he asking?"

"He asked if you were Amoian, and if you were attached."

"Really?" Toma was so shocked by this that he was rendered speechless. Ayuda, the handsome new bodyguard, was asking about him?

Tai nodded, smiling at Toma's reaction. "I think he might have a...thing for you."

“Oh,” Toma replied, awkwardly. He hardly knew how to react to this. “How long will it take for this water to freeze?”

“Probably a few hours. I really don’t know. But if you could keep checking on it and then, once it’s frozen, start chipping off some ice into a bowl or something, that would be great.”

Toma continued to assist Tai throughout the morning, and when he found that the containers of ice were frozen, he took one out and began chipping off bits of ice. The amber-colored ice broke off in a surprising, interesting fashion, creating beautiful, multi-faceted ice chips.

“Pretty,” Toma whispered, smiling. Tai had been right. The peach water was more attractive.

What Toma did not realize, and what Tai had completely forgotten, was that in the freezer there was also a container of Tarnacsian cider, which Toma had erroneously mistaken for the peach water. And, since he could not read Aristian, he had ignored the label on the side of the container, assuming it had always been there.

And so, a great bowl full of Tarnacsian cider chips now sat in the freezer, about to set the penthouse on its head.

* * *

“The Commander has landed!” Toma announced, once the transmission came in. “He’s at the aerospace port now!”

Although all was in readiness, everyone rushed around in response to this news, as though there were still a million things to be done. All, of course, except Iason, who sat calmly in his chair.

He had been waiting all day for Riki to come into the great hall of his own volition, but Riki had remained in his room, sulking.

“Toma,” Iason said, finally. “Send Riki to me.”

“Yes, Master,” Toma replied, with a slight bow. He practically ran to the mongrel’s room, so excited about the Commander’s visit that he was pumped full of energy.

Riki’s door was closed.

“Sir Riki,” Toma called. “Master Iason wants to see you!”

Toma heard some grumbling noises within, and then, after a moment, Riki emerged.

When Toma saw him dressed so scantily, the low rise of his chain mail bikini revealing the hollow between his hipbones, it was all he could do to keep from laughing.

“What are you smiling about?” Riki demanded.

Toma shook his head. “Nothing. My lips just...naturally do that.” He desperately tried not to smile, pursing his lips together.

“Yeah, I know. I look ridiculous.”

“Actually you look...very sexy.”

“Hmmm,” Riki snorted, pushing past him.

Riki had stayed in his room the entire day, angry and, most of all, hurt. He was angry over being punished, humiliated at having to wear the stupid outfit, and hurt over what Iason had said to him when he called him a filthy mongrel. He could not have known that Iason spent the day in similar distress, obsessing over Riki’s words and regretting his own.

In retrospect, Iason felt he had let his anger get the best of him. He did not want to use sex to punish Riki, but he had done so—and it had not even been the first time he had resorted to such a measure. He knew, also, that Riki had been upset by his words—words spoken in anger, words that Iason did not truly mean. He wanted to gather his pet in his arms and apologize, but his pride prevented him from doing so. After all, he was Master, wasn’t he? And Riki had to be taught to obey. It was as simple as that.

Yet when hour after hour passed and Riki did not come to him, Iason began to worry. His heart was heavy and his head was pounding; he wanted his pet on his lap, snuggling close. He wanted all to be resolved between them. He wanted to love Riki and to know he was loved.

When Riki finally came trudging into the hall, head down, Iason felt his heart stop. His pet looked simply irresistible so scantily attired. But the mongrel’s glum disposition was disconcerting.

“Come here, Riki,” he said softly, patting his lap.

Riki walked toward him with great reluctance, looking stiff and angry.

“Are you...sore, my pet?”

“What do you think?” Riki shot back, coldly. “Of course I’m fucking sore.”

“I’ll not have you sulking throughout the Commander’s visit,” Iason remarked, putting his arms around him as Riki climbed onto his lap. “Perhaps...just this once...I could give you an O-3.”

Riki softened at this, rather anxious for some pain relief. “That would be...really good.”

Even so, the mongrel knew no medication could touch the pain in his heart. He allowed his head to fall back against Iason’s chest, sighing.

“Oh Riki,” Iason whispered. “I missed you today. You kept away.”

“You could have come to me,” Riki countered.

Iason laughed softly. “Yes. But I suppose...I was too proud.”

Riki nodded. “Me too.”

“When I get angry,” Iason began, then stopped, sighing. “Sometimes I may say things I don’t really mean.”

Riki listened, his heart beating a bit faster.

“What I mean to say is, what I said earlier—I said it in anger. Those were not words from my heart.”

“Well...I was pretty pissed, too,” Riki conceded. “I guess I probably said a few things I didn’t mean.”

Iason smiled, kissing the top of his head. “I’m glad to hear it.”

“You know I don’t hate you,” Riki continued. “I mean, that’s bloody obvious.”

“And you know I don’t consider you filthy, Riki. It was...quite cruel of me to say such a thing.”

“Yeah,” Riki agreed, grinning. “It was.”

Iason laughed, relaxing. It felt good to have Riki in his arms again and to know all was well again. He wished he could spend the rest of the day alone with his pet, rather than deal with the

Commander. But, Voshka Khosi's visit was imminent, and he knew it was time to get Riki ready.

"I'm glad to see you've dressed appropriately, Riki."

"Yeah. I've dressed...appropriately," his pet replied, smiling slyly. "Yeah. This is real appropriate. I'd like to see you dressed so appropriately."

Iason smiled. "Perhaps you shall, one of these days, if you are good."

"Hey, and then can I tie you up?" Riki asked, excited.

Laughing, Iason pulled him close, kissing his cheek. "Pet. I adore you."

"Then, how about letting me having my smokes back? I'm dying for them."

"Not yet. I heard you...coughing a bit, before."

"No I wasn't," Riki tried, desperate. "That was...Toma! He's always coughing."

"Riki," Iason scolded. "You know that's a fabrication."

"Please? I really really really really really need one."

"No, Riki."

"Aw, fuck."

"And, it's time to get you ready. The Commander will be here at any moment."

"By 'get me ready' I guess you mean chain me up like an animal," Riki muttered.

"Just for the duration of his visit. And, I'm afraid I must remind you that the Commander will be deciding your punishment."

"What! You mean...before...that didn't count?" Riki wailed.

"That was an entirely different affair, as you well know."

"But my ass hurts."

"And what does that teach you? Perhaps you'll learn to adjust your behavior accordingly in the future, if you're so adamant on avoiding punishment."

"But...I can't help myself," Riki whined. "And anyway, he was coming on to you. He wants to fuck you, I can tell."

Iason smiled at this, thrilled with his pet's transparent jealousy. "Whether that is true or not is not at issue. You addressed him most disrespectfully, Riki. Besides that, Jupiter insists that you be punished."

"Why don't you just say you punished me? She'll never know; she's just a bloody machine."

At this, Iason lowered his voice to a whisper. "You mustn't talk so about Jupiter."

"What? Is she listening right now? Don't tell me she's spying on us?"

"I don't know," Iason whispered softly in his ear, and then, louder, "Hush. Now, it's time, Riki." With that, the Blondie set Riki on the floor and then stood up, going to the cabinet to retrieve his pet's chains. They were the special, gold-plated initialed chains that were made exclusively for Riki, although the mongrel did not seem to appreciate the extra effort Iason had gone to on this count.

Riki groaned, loudly.

"Come now, pet," Iason scolded. "You have the finest chain-set in all of Amoi."

"Hmmm. I guess I won't be satisfied until you dip my urinal in gold, too. Only I guess you'd put my initials on that."

Iason smiled at this, waiting for Riki to hold out his wrists.

Scowling, Riki allowed himself to be manacled and led to the corner of the great hall, where he was chained to the hall post.

"I suppose I'll have to eat on the floor again," he remarked, bitterly.

"No," Iason replied. "I'll have Toma or Katze take you to the nook, where you'll all take your meals for the duration of the Commander's visit."

"Oh. I get it. So you and Mr. Hotshot can have a private candlelight dinner."

"It will hardly be private," Iason replied, gesturing to the guards that now lined the hall, frozen like statues.

"They don't count," Riki snorted. "They're just...grunts."

“They happen to be members of Jupiter’s Guard,” Iason replied, with an amused smile. “The finest warriors in all of Amoi.”

“Whatever. I bet they don’t even have dicks.”

“Is that the criteria for whether or not our dinner is private? Whether or not the guards have genitals?”

“Excuse me, Master Iason,” Ayuda interrupted, approaching the Blondie with a low bow. “I must insist that, from this point on, I remain at all times near you. Odi says that the Commander will be here any moment.”

Iason nodded. “Very well, Ayuda.”

Then Ayuda turned to Riki with a slight smile. “If it eases your mind at all, Riki, I’ll have you know I’m fully equipped.”

Riki blinked at this, at first not catching the bodyguard’s meaning. Then, a smile crept onto his face. “Oh. Yeah. That’s...good.”

“Where is Toma?” Iason wondered aloud. “I could use a glass of wine.” He returned to his chair, pressing the small button on table beside it, which sounded a pleasant chime throughout the penthouse. The relaxed, almost dismissive quality of the chime was completely incongruent with Iason’s expectations regarding it; he expected Toma to come running when summoned, and, fortunately, Toma did so.

“Yes, Master?” he asked, nervously, as he dashed out from the kitchen. Katze had warned him that he should, at all times, stay near Iason so that he would not have to use the chime.

“Toma. Some wine, please. The very best.”

“Yes, Sir,” Toma replied, bowing. The very best. That would be...Icarian Amber? No—Aristian Red Emperor. Toma made his way over to the bar, desperately trying to remember Katze’s instructions. Yes. He was fairly certain that Iason preferred Aristian Red Emperor. He remembered this because Toma found the name of the wine peculiar—Aristia did not even have an emperor. It was ruled by a Prince, or so he seemed to remember.

He retrieved the wine and returned with it promptly. Iason took the wine, nodding his approval as he swirled the dark crimson liquid in the glass and caught a whiff of its distinctive scent.

“Now, Toma. I assume everything is in readiness?”

Toma nodded. “I believe so, Master.”

“Good. You may...eat with the others, when Tai is ready to serve the household. For now, please remain here in the hall in case I require you.”

“Yes, Master,” Toma replied, bowing so low that Iason almost smiled. He was pleased with Toma’s capabilities, as well as his unquestioning submission and deference.

“That will be all, Toma.”

“Yes, Sir.” Toma backed away, standing against the wall between two guards.

“The Commander is in the building,” Freyn announced through the intercom. “He’s on his way up.”

Iason took a sip of his wine, feigning disinterest. In fact, his heart was beating so loud it was as though a drum was pounding in his head. In moments he would be face to face with Commander Voshka Khosi. With...Anori’s brother.

He knew the Commander was on the floor even before Freyn announced it. He could hear the guards outside greeting him with the traditional Amoian salute—beating their wrist guards against their shields.

When the door finally hummed open, admitting, first, a handful of the Commander’s personal retinue and then finally, the Commander himself, Iason slowly rose to his feet.

In person, Voshka Khosi was larger than Iason would have guessed—as tall as himself. And there was no question that he was one of the most attractive people he had ever encountered. His dark hair flowed to his shoulders in shiny waves, striking against his fair, flawless skin. His ornate, elaborate armor was studded with jewels, and his cape spun around behind him as he walked into the penthouse.

Voshka took one look at Iason and smiled, a heart-stopping, mesmerizing smile. “At last we meet, Iason,” he said, his voice low and rich.

“Commander.” Iason gave a sharp bow, daring to meet Voshka’s gaze. He could immediately see why the Commander was so successful. There was simply something about him that was irresistible. It was more than his physical good looks—which were almost overwhelming—it was something intangible, an intoxicating charisma that defied explanation but which demanded respect. Indeed, had Iason not been so preoccupied with Voshka’s relation to Anori—and had his own heart not already been lost to Riki—he might have been rather smitten by the tall, dark warrior.

“Welcome to Amoi, and to my home. Please. What might I get you to drink?”

“It is a pleasure to be here, I assure you,” Voshka replied, smiling meaningfully. He nodded to Iason’s wineglass. “What are you having?”

“Aristian Red Emperor. It is...quite superb, I assure you.”

Voshka laughed at this. “I’m sure it is. That happens to be my favorite wine.”

“Oh?” Iason smiled, pleased. “Mine, as well.”

“Already...we have something in common.”

“Toma,” Iason said, glancing toward his Furniture.

Toma nodded and immediately went to the bar to fetch the Commander his drink. He was shaking from head to toe—completely overcome by the presence of the infamous Commander Khosi.

“Please. Come...sit with me.” Iason gestured to a chair near his own and Voshka approached him, smiling.

“Again...my pleasure.”

“And...how was your journey?”

Both men sat down.

“Uneventful. Pleasant enough. I am glad to be out of deep space.”

Iason nodded. “I must confess, I rather dread space voyages.”

“It’s...all that emptiness. You feel as though you’re going to be sucked into nothingness,” Voshka replied, crossing his legs.

“I quite...agree with you. Although there is nothing quite like the approach to a planet.”

Voshka nodded. “Speaking of which, Amoi is breathtaking on approach, so golden, with just those few streaks of green.”

Iason nodded. “The planet is mostly desert.”

“Your oceans are such a beautiful shade of blue-green. I find that...fascinating.”

“If I recall, most of your...oceans are covered in ice,” Iason replied, sipping his wine.

“Your wine, Commander,” Toma said, softly, proffering the glass with trembling hands.

Voshka noted the boy’s nervousness and smiled; he was quite use to eliciting such a reaction. He nodded, taking the wine. “Not completely,” he answered, turning back to Iason. “Although it appears so from space.”

Now Iason surprised him by speaking in fluent Alphazenian. “Yes. I recall during my last visit there, that the planet almost looked like a ball of ice.”

“You...speak my tongue,” Voshka replied, raising an eyebrow, and replying in Alphazenian. “You’re...full of surprises, Iason.”

“I learned it...many years ago. I have frequent contact with your traders so...I have many opportunities to practice it. Although I fear my grammar must be appalling.”

“Not so. You speak perfectly,” Voshka replied, grinning. “And I must confess, I’d much rather speak my own language than yours. No offense, but Amoian is...one of the more difficult languages I’ve encountered.”

Iason nodded. “Yes. We have...more verb conjugations than any other language in the galaxy.”

“Precisely. Damned verb conjugations.”

They both laughed at this. Now the jangling of Riki’s chains diverted Voshka’s attention to the corner of the great hall, where Riki sat, glaring at him. The mongrel had hated the Commander the

moment he had walked into the hall; he was too good-looking, in his view. He also hated the way Iason was so pleasant with him, almost flirtatious. Then, when they had begun speaking in some other language, it was all too much. Now he couldn't even follow what they were talking about.

"Ah. Is this your pet?" Voshka asked, motioning toward Riki with his wine glass.

"Yes," Iason answered, without turning.

Voshka laughed. "He doesn't like me much, does he?"

Now Iason turned and, upon perceiving Riki's unfriendly countenance, sighed. "Riki," he scolded, sharply.

Riki opened his eyes wide, as though wondering what he had done.

The Commander chuckled at this. "Oh. He's quite splendid. Is he Amoian? He doesn't look anything like the pets I've encountered here."

"He's Amoian," Iason replied, "although he was not bred in an Academy."

"You...snatched him out of the wild, then? Trying to tame him?"

Iason smiled. "In a manner of speaking."

As this conversation was spoken in the Commander's tongue, Riki had no idea what they were saying, though he felt somehow that he was the topic of conversation. He squirmed uncomfortably, wondering what sort of punishment the Commander would dream up for him.

"I see. I must say, he's quite exquisite. I prefer pets with a little spirit, I think I already told you."

"Yes. Ah. Speaking of Riki, I do believe he...insulted you during our last conversation. So, I have waited for your arrival to decide on his punishment. What would satisfy you?"

"Oh dear," Voshka replied, grinning. "You're asking me to decide his punishment? You've...tapped into a weakness of mine."

Iason waited, deciding not to respond to this rather intriguing comment.

“Although, what I’d really like is to cart him off to my bed. Perhaps you’d let me administer the punishment in private? I have a...sword that needs sharpening.”

Iason blinked at this, uncertain how to reply. He certainly did not want Riki in the Commander’s bed.

Voshka picked up on his discomfort immediately, smiling slyly. “Ah. I see. You...do not care to share your pet in such a manner. Is it true then, what they say? You Amoians don’t take your pets?”

Choosing not to reply to this, Iason lowered his eyes, staring at his wine.

“Oh dear. I’ve quite...embarrassed you, I think. Forgive me if I’ve wandered into some...taboo subject.”

Iason shook his head. “It isn’t that. But,” he glanced at Riki, “that is, I would much rather if...the punishment took place in my presence.”

“Oh? Then you’d like to join us, perhaps?” Voshka could not resist teasing the Blondie, who looked mortified at his comment. Laughing, the Commander leaned back in his chair. “You are so delightful, Iason. The look on your face. Priceless.”

“Then,” Iason began, uncertainly.

Voshka, realizing now that Iason was loathe to let him enjoy any type of intimacy with his pet, saw an opportunity to leverage his position. He smiled again, taking another sip of his wine. “Then, suppose we make an...adjustment. I confess, I was rather offended by your pet’s comment,” he replied, trying his best now to be serious, though, in fact, he had not been affected in the slightest by Riki’s insult. “What would satisfy me is a night alone with him, to do my will. But, I will accept an alternative. A night in my bed...with you.”

Voshka took another sip, watching Iason’s reaction. For his part, the Blondie managed to remain unreadable, although inside he was far from being unaffected by the Commander’s offer. He’d promised Riki that he wouldn’t engage in sexual contact with Voshka...but on the other hand, there was simply no way he was going to grant the Commander his wish to take Riki to his bed.

After a long moment, he raised his gaze, having come to his decision. "Very well," he replied, softly. "I will give you...your alternative. One night."

"I see," Voshka answered, now plagued by an uncomfortable tightness in his groin. He uncrossed his legs, so excited by Iason's acquiescence that he could hardly wait for nightfall. He glanced out the window, cursing the sun's slow descent.

Iason was cognizant of his arousal, but remained quiet, pretending not to notice.

Now Voshka laughed again. "I must confess, Iason—I am going to have a...hard time waiting."

The Blondie smiled slightly at his joke. "Toma," he said, without turning. "Please...bring me some more wine."

"Yes, Sir," Toma replied, rushing off to obey. He was so nervous now that when he approached Iason with the bottle, he somehow stumbled, pouring wine all over Iason's beautiful clothes.

"Toma!" Iason bellowed, standing up.

"I...I...am s-s-s-so...sorry, Master," Toma stammered, mortified.

"You will be sorry, when I have Katze give you a good taming," Iason replied, angrily.

Toma bowed his head, struggling to hold back his impending tears.

Iason sighed. "Please excuse me," he said to Voshka. "I must...change and...shower off first."

"It is no matter," the Commander replied, with a reassuring smile. He watched Iason stride off to his bedroom and retrieve some new clothes and then, head down the hall, trailed by Ayuda.

With a mysterious smile, Voshka rose to his feet and followed him. His own bodyguard, Anders, kept to his side, and when the Commander reached the bath hall, they were both stopped by Ayuda.

"Master Iason is engaged within," Ayuda said.

"Yes. I know. And I'd like to be engaged with him. So kindly step aside."

Ayuda was reluctant to do so, but felt he had little choice. At any rate, he did not suspect the Commander meant Iason any harm. He had watched the entire scene in the great hall carefully, and though he knew little Alphazanian, he was fairly certain that Iason and Voshka had come to some sort of an...arrangement. He allowed Voshka to pass, eliciting a smirk from the Commander, who turned to Anders before he entered the bath hall.

“We are not to be disturbed,” he warned.

“Yes, Commander,” Anders replied, bowing.

Voshka then continued on inside, the door humming closed behind him.

Anders and Ayuda exchanged a glance, each of them well aware of what would take place within.

Iason was already in the shower; and, as much as he hated to admit it, the Commander had managed to arouse him dreadfully; he now stood, pumping himself in an attempt to relieve his own need before joining Voshka again. He didn't have feelings in the least for the Commander, but he found him undeniably attractive. He was so preoccupied with this task, and the spray of the water was so loud that he did not perceive the Commander's approach.

Suddenly, he realized that the shower door had slid open. He spun around, startled.

“Please. Don't let me stop you,” Voshka said, smiling.

Each of them eyed the other, equally impressed. Commander Khosi had a body of a warrior—perfectly chiseled, every muscle ripped in precisely the most alluring way. And Iason, of course, was nothing short of a sex god, dripping wet, his immense organ throbbing in his hand, his long, golden hair hanging in damp tresses.

Voshka took a step forward and spun Iason around, taking hold of his wrists and positioning his hands up against the wall of the shower. He pressed his own body close behind him, taking the Blondie's cock into his hand, stroking him with deliberate slowness.

“Do you like to be taken by force?” he whispered, biting Iason's neck.

Iason gasped, thrilled.

“Don’t move,” Voshka ordered, inserting a finger into Iason’s ass, “or I shall have to punish you.” The Commander tried a second finger, then began thrusting. “Do you like this?”

“Yes,” Iason admitted.

“Good. Because now I’m going to fuck you. Spread your legs.”

Iason obeyed, beside himself with excitement. Something about the Commander was extraordinarily arousing.

Voshka continued to stroke him for a few minutes, then removed his hand to spread Iason’s buttocks apart, pressing his own swollen member up against the Blondie’s portal. The Commander began kissing the back of Iason’s shoulder as he penetrated.

Groaning, he sunk into the Blondie, his eyes rolling back. “Mercy,” he moaned, reaching around to find Iason’s cock again. Then he began thrusting, hard. “Do you like a good hard fuck?” he asked, his voice thick with sex. “Like this?”

“Harder,” Iason whispered.

“Harder? Is that what you said?” Excited, Voshka began fucking him vigorously, crying out when the Blondie began contracting against him. “What are you doing? Oh...Iason...keep going that!”

Now Voshka began pumping him faster, realizing that his own release was imminent. “I want to taste you tonight,” he whispered. “Tonight, I’ll swallow you.”

This promise managed to push the Blondie over the brink. He began his low sex cry, which had the predictable effect of stimulating Voshka’s own climax. Both of them vocalized their pleasure in grunts and moans that were not altogether concealed by the sound of the pounding shower.

Outside, Ayuda and Anders exchanged glances again. Anders smiled slightly, amused that the Commander had already managed to seduce Iason Mink. Ayuda, however, was not pleased. He had a feeling this new intimacy between the two great men would only

lead to trouble and he knew, moreover, that the Blondie's pet would be furious when he discovered their union.

He shook his head, preparing for a stormy night.

Iason's Punishment

Almost immediately, even as Iason was still riding in the wake of his release, he was struck with a deep sense of regret—and guilt—over his congress with Voshka Khosi. The Commander was breathing hard, offering a few additional kisses to his bare shoulder, his hands still resting gently on the Blondie's hips.

"Iason," he groaned, "I do believe I may be in love."

The Blondie did not reply, hanging his head and closing his eyes. He was deeply perplexed by what had just happened. It was almost as if...he had been under some sort of spell, one which was now completely broken. Although he had promised to spend the night with the Commander, Iason had done so only to prevent Voshka from touching Riki. So then why had he succumbed so easily to the Commander's advances? From the moment Voshka had stepped into the shower, Iason had felt as though he simply could not resist him. He found his attraction to the Alphazanian puzzling, especially because, at the moment, the allure had completely vanished.

"That was a mistake," he said, softly.

"A mistake?" Now Voshka reached out and pushed Iason's damp tresses aside, studying the side of the Blondie's face. "But...I thought you...enjoyed that?"

"I confess, I did. But...I should not have." Unable to explain the turmoil of his mind, Iason fell silent.

"And why is that? Is it so wrong to enjoy carnal pleasures? Or...is that another Amoian taboo?"

“It is forbidden,” Iason nodded. This was not why he was upset, but he felt he couldn’t share the true reason with the Commander. Already he was worried how Riki would react when he discovered their union and that Iason had broken his promise.

“You’re trembling,” Voshka remarked, after a moment. “Or are you cold? Let’s...get dressed.”

Iason nodded again, anxious to get out of the shower and back into his clothes. For a moment there was silence as the two great men dried off and donned their attire. Iason refused to look at the Commander, keeping his gaze averted.

Voshka smiled. “Are you blushing, Iason?” he teased.

Now the Blondie looked up, his blue eyes filled with such intense emotion that for a moment the Commander was rendered silent. He was puzzled because, although he knew the Amoians had bizarre beliefs and prohibitions regarding sexuality, he knew—from speaking with his brother, Anori—that the Blondies secretly engaged in coital pleasures of all kinds, without remorse. But perhaps this was the first time for Iason, who was, apparently, the direct report to Jupiter, the digital deity who ruled Amoi and who imposed the rigid rules on acceptable sexual conduct.

Perhaps he was best served giving Iason a little space. After all, he had all night to win him over. Voshka smiled at this prospect, anxious for the “night” to formally begin.

* * *

“Toma,” Riki whispered, urgently. “Where’s he going? That...General?” Riki strained against his chains, trying to see around the corner, but found that his chains did not reach far enough.

Toma, quietly wiping up the wine from the floor, did not seem to hear him; in fact, the poor boy was close to tears, and petrified about the punishment promised by his new Master. Although he had certainly been disciplined before, he’d never been tamed, though from what he’d witnessed he knew it was something he

would not enjoy. Even more than that, he felt extraordinarily let down that he had displeased his Master so soon after his arrival. Like most Furniture, Toma had a certain “work ethic,” and truly wanted to please his Blondie Master. To be yelled at in such a fashion, and to have so clumsily spilled wine all over Iason on such an important day, was devastating.

Toma took it very hard.

“Toma!” Riki hissed, frantic. He had deep suspicions about the Commander’s intentions, and he was beside himself with jealousy, wanting to know what was going on. “Please! Tell me where...he went!”

The boy looked up, gazing at Riki as if seeing him for the first time.

Riki was momentarily silenced by the look on Toma’s face. “Oh. Hey...don’t pay any attention to what Iason said. He’s a dickhead all the time.”

“He said I’m to be punished,” Toma replied, his voice wavering.

“Um...yeah. Sorry...about that. That sucks—that asshole! Now will you PLEASE tell me where the General went?”

Without even thinking about it, Toma answered exactly what he saw. “He just went into the...bath hall.”

“But that’s....that’s where Iason is!” Riki cried. “Fuck! Toma...please, could you...I mean, I need to,” now the mongrel changed his tactics, putting on an innocent face, “you know...relieve myself, and I want to do so privately so could you release me?”

Not so easily fooled by Riki’s ploy, Toma narrowed his eyes. “Not without Master Iason’s permission.”

“Please? I’ll ask Katze to go easy on you!” Riki pleaded with Toma, but to no avail; Toma was smart enough not to accommodate the mongrel’s request.

Shaking his head, he stood up and started to head to the kitchen.

“Wait! Couldn’t you...at least...go find out—”

At that moment Katze came into the hall, having heard Riki shouting from the Observatory where he was checking to make sure the hot tub was in order and a fire had been started.

“Riki,” he scolded. “Keep your voice down. Iason won’t have you carrying in such a manner, as you well know.”

“Katze,” Riki pleaded, “please. I think...that pervert is after Iason. Toma says he followed Iason into the bath hall.”

Katze frowned at this, peering down the hall. Upon spying both Ayuda and the Commander’s bodyguard outside the bath hall, he realized the veracity of Riki’s claim. But...what was Iason doing in the bath hall? Even if...he had gone to relieve himself, it was a bit odd that the Commander had followed him. But then...he *was* from Alpha Zen. Katze knew most Alphazeniens had a reputation for being a bit...eccentric.

“Can you go find out what’s going on?” Riki seemed so worried that Katze felt compelled to oblige him.

“All right. But quiet down.”

“Thanks, Katze,” Riki replied, relieved.

Now Katze made his way down the hall, stopping when he came to the bath hall. He turned to Ayuda.

“Is Master Iason in there?” he asked.

Ayuda nodded.

“But...where is the Commander?”

A small snicker escaped Anders, which was not lost on Katze. He frowned, then leaned closer to Ayuda. “They’re both in there?”

“Yes,” Ayuda replied, looking rather hesitant to share this information.

At that moment the unmistakable sounds of sexual exploration could be heard from within, Iason’s moans and then...the Commander’s grunting and groaning.

For the first time in a long while, Katze felt angry with Iason. Although he knew the Blondie had a right, as Master of his house, to engage in whatever activities he chose, it seemed nothing less than cruel to pair with the Commander so openly. Surely Iason had

to know that Riki would be watching him, wondering what was going on. Had he done it to punish Riki?

But from the sounds that emanated from within, it seemed that the Blondie was pairing with the Commander because he wanted to.

“That bastard,” he whispered.

“Maybe you ought not tell Riki,” Ayuda suggested.

Katze shook his head. “He’ll find out soon enough. I just can’t believe....” Now he trailed off, his brow furrowed. He sighed. He would never understand Iason. Especially considering...who the Commander was. And what had happened...to Anori. Katze thought about this for a moment. Though...perhaps that had something to do with it? Perhaps Iason was acting so out of some sort of guilt?

The Blondie’s moans left no question that, regardless of Iason’s reasons for engaging with the Commander, he was thoroughly enjoying himself now. But Katze knew that it was not his position to judge Iason. With a callousness and ingrained obedience that came from years of experience serving Blondies, he forced himself to put aside his own emotions regarding the situation; Iason was Master of the house. What he chose to in the bedroom—or shower—or otherwise, was his prerogative. He was a Blondie, and as such, Katze could not question his choices.

“Katze,” Ayuda began, with a deep breath. He was reluctant to bring up the matter but knew he had no choice. “I...have a message for you from Iason. You’re to punish Toma.”

Katze was surprised at this. “Why?”

“He...spilt wine all over Iason. That’s why he went to take a shower.”

“No shit.” Katze couldn’t resist a small smile, wishing he could have seen the Blondie’s composure spoiled in front of Commander Khosi.

“He says to give Toma 15 or 20 strikes, exposed.”

Katze nodded, a bit surprised at the severity of the punishment. “All right.” He turned to leave, when Ayuda rested a hand on his shoulder.

“Make it 15,” he whispered.

Katze shot Ayuda a little smile. He would have only given him 15 strikes anyway, but Ayuda's intervention on his behalf was endearing. He wondered if there was some sort of romance brewing between them.

"You do realize Toma is modified?" he whispered back.

Ayuda smiled. "That makes no difference."

"Hmmm." Katze returned the smile, giving the bodyguard a little wink. "Shall I...give him a message from you?"

"No. That is, yes, actually," Ayuda replied. "Ask him...if he wants to go swimming with me later tonight."

"Swimming eh?" Katze grinned at this. "Now, is clothing optional, or--?"

Ayuda punched him playfully on the shoulder. "Get outta here, you."

"Ow! Don't kill the messenger!" Katze rubbed his arm in mock anguish as he returned to the hall.

Riki jumped to his feet. "Did you find out?" he asked, breathlessly.

Now Katze grew serious, pausing as he tried to decide how to tell him.

"Oh fuck." Riki's face fell as he studied Katze. "You're shitting me. Right?"

Katze sighed, shaking his head. "No."

"What do you mean?"

"They're...together."

"They're..." Now Riki fell silent, unable to believe this news. "You mean they're in the shower together?" His eyes gleamed darkly with anger, his voice low and hard.

"I'm afraid so."

"You mean they're...fucking?"

Katze nodded.

"That bloody liar! Fuck!"

Now Riki was so angry, he began yanking on his chains, trying to free himself.

"Calm down," Katze warned. "You're going to hurt yourself."

“I’ll fucking kill them both!” Riki screamed, so furious that at the moment he truly meant it.

“Hush, Riki! If he hears you....”

“I don’t give a fuck if he hears me or not! I hope he does! That lying sadistic fuck!”

“Riki!” Now Katze was alarmed. Riki was yanking so hard on his chains that his wrists had begun to bleed. “All right. Hey. Calm down. Please, Riki.”

Now Toma and Tai both rushed into the hall, and together with Katze they attempted to restrain the enraged mongrel.

“Fucking let me go!”

“Riki!” Iason bellowed, sharply. “Cease this at once.”

Riki froze for a moment, staring at Iason, who had hurried into the hall upon hearing the commotion, his hair still damp from the shower.

“You,” he spat, with disgust. “You fucking liar. I’ll never trust you again. I hate you!”

“Pet. You will not—”

“Don’t call me pet! I’d rather be dead than your pet! Sell me, kill me, I don’t fucking care! All I know is I hate you Iason. I never want to see your face again.”

“Riki—”

“No! This isn’t a game. I’m dead serious.”

Now Iason fell silent, for once rendered speechless by Riki’s tirade.

At that moment the Commander walked into the hall, stopping next to Iason.

Seeing him, Riki’s eyes grew cold. He turned back to Iason, his face dark. “You promised me, Iason. I trusted you. But you lied. You fucked him. Now I know I mean nothing to you. And now...you mean nothing to me.”

Now Iason noticed that Riki’s wrists were bleeding. “Oh love,” he whispered, without even thinking about his audience, “you’re hurt.”

“Don’t call me love,” Riki snarled. “You don’t know what love is.”

Iason blinked at this, then turned to Katze. “Go get the first aid kit.”

“I hope you don’t think you’re going to touch me. You’re never going to lay a hand on me again, not without a fight. I’ll not have your filthy lying Blondie hands on my body.”

“Riki, please,” Iason said softly, moving towards him.

“Don’t touch me!” Riki screamed. “Don’t come near me, you fucking asshole!”

Now Voshka, having watched this scene with great interest, suddenly pieced together part of the mystery of Iason Mink. He realized then that Iason was sexually intimate with his pet, despite the fact that it was clearly forbidden on Amoi. This was fascinating, given Iason’s role as Head of the Syndicate. He saw, too, that his pet had strong feelings for him, and that through his seduction of Iason he had managed to complicate the relationship between the Blondie and his exotic mongrel pet.

He leaned forward to whisper in Iason’s ear. “Let him brood on it for a bit,” he advised. “Why don’t we find somewhere quiet to talk, just you and I, until he cools down?”

“I trusted you,” Riki repeated, his voice now breaking with emotion as his eyes filled with tears.

“Oh, Riki,” Iason whispered, wanting desperately to take his pet into his arms.

“Just leave me alone,” the mongrel sobbed, sinking to the floor and burying his face in his arms.

Iason instinctively moved forward again, crouching down beside his pet. He offered a comforting hand on his pet’s shoulder. Riki reacted to this as though his hand was acid, shrugging him off angrily. “I said don’t touch me!” he snapped. “You fucker!” He glared at Iason, his eyes dark and unforgiving, as a tear escaped down his cheek.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” Iason tried, softly, his own voice now wavering a bit.

“But you did. You did hurt me,” Riki choked back. “And I’ll NEVER forgive you. I’ll never trust you. And...I’ll never love you again. It can never be the same between us now.”

Katze now returned with the first aid kit, immediately crouching down to tend to the mongrel’s wrists, which were both bleeding. He was careful not to look at Iason, afraid that he would be unable to conceal his own anger toward the Blondie.

“Riki,” Iason began again, but was silenced when Riki suddenly lunged for him. He instinctively backed away and stood up as Katze grabbed him, trying to restrain him. Ayuda stepped forward to help, for Riki was suddenly like a wild man, struggling and swinging.

“I’ll kill you! I wanna watch you die!”

“Riki!” Unable to get Riki to calm down, Katze gave him a hard slap across the face. “Hush,” he hissed. “You’ll get yourself killed with that talk.”

“Good! I want to die!”

Now Voshka put a hand on Iason’s shoulder. “He’s not going to calm down until you leave,” he whispered. “Let’s...go.”

Iason, perceiving Riki’s increased agitation when Voshka leaned forward to whisper in his ear, nodded. “Very well. Perhaps that would be best.”

“Yeah, go on!” Riki shrieked, as Iason and the Commander headed up to the Observatory. “Go fuck him some more. How about in the hot tub! That would be all cozy and fucking romantic, wouldn’t it! You prick! I hate you Iason!”

Iason stopped for a moment upon hearing these words, wanting to turn back and try to talk with Riki.

Voshka put a hand on his back to discourage this. “He’s too angry, Iason. He’s not going to listen to you now.”

The Blondie found the Commander’s advice reassuring. Somehow Voshka seemed to know exactly what was going on. He nodded, and they continued up to the Observatory, Riki’s anguished jeers following them all the way up the stairs.

Iason was trembling by the time they reached the Observatory. Voshka looked at him, concerned.

“All right. Let’s sit down. Are you...can I get you a drink?”

“What have I done?” Iason whispered.

“I’m afraid I...owe you an apology, Iason. I didn’t realize you were...involved.”

Iason shook his head. “I couldn’t tell you.”

“Yes, I’m...beginning to understand. Your...Jupiter? Forbids your love?”

“Yes.”

“Ah. Then you are...risking a lot, I think?”

“I don’t care.”

Voshka smiled. “I always knew there was a rebellious streak in you. Fascinating.”

“He’s...furious with me.”

“He’ll get over it.”

“I’m...not so sure.” Now Iason looked at Voshka directly in the eyes. “I promised him, you see.”

“You mean, that you wouldn’t sleep with me?”

Iason nodded.

Voshka smiled. “Ah. But then...you couldn’t resist me?”

Iason bowed his head at this, ashamed to concede that it was true.

The Commander laughed. “Well now. I’d love to think it was something particularly about me that drove you to break your promise. But,” he smiled mysteriously, “I’m afraid I may have, shall we say, had a little help.”

Iason frowned. “What do you mean?”

The Commander then pushed back his sleeve, pointing to a small gold-colored tattoo on his forearm. “This is G-wave modulator. It interacts with my chemistry to make me irresistible.” He grinned. “So I’m told, anyway.”

The Blondie felt extraordinarily relieved to learn this, because the Commander’s ability to seduce him so easily had been greatly troubling to him.

“Once your pet calms down a bit, perhaps we can explain things to him. And, I assure you, if I had known...about your

situation, I would have tried my best not to seduce you. Though once I get aroused, there's not much I can do. This thing gets automatically triggered when I get an erection."

Iason wasn't sure what to think about this; in truth, he felt a little annoyed with the Commander, but envious at the same time, wondering if he should consider getting such an implant.

"I know what you're thinking," Voshka whispered. "But I'm afraid it's quite impossible. The scientist who designed this—a woman, in fact, quite lovely, too—is, unfortunately dead, and no one but her knows how it works." Now he leaned forward. "And Iason, you don't need one. You're irresistible, just as you are."

Iason blushed at this, which was unusual for the Blondie, who was rarely embarrassed. He was also a bit mortified to discover that he was developing another erection. "Can you...turn that thing off?"

Voshka laughed—a low and rich, decidedly sexy laugh. "I'm afraid not." He reached out and took a strand of the Blondie's hair between his fingers, marveling over its silkiness. "But, Iason, what difference does it make now? Your pet is already angry with you. He suspects you're engaged with me now anyway. So...why not enjoy yourself? What do you gain by being miserable?"

The Blondie made no reply to this, shutting his eyes and trying to stave off his arousal. When Voshka leaned forward and began kissing his throat, he moaned, shuddering.

"Oh yes," Voshka breathed. "You're so...erotic. The sounds you make drive me wild."

"Please stop," Iason begged. "I don't want to...hurt Riki anymore."

"I can't stop," Voshka whispered, now running a hand down Iason's body. "I'm sorry. It's your fault, you know. For turning me on."

"I wasn't trying to...arouse you," Iason protested.

"Ah, but you did." Voshka now began to deftly unbutton in the diagonal of buttons on Iason's tunic, sliding his hand beneath the fabric to his warm skin. "And now I want to continue."

"Vosh, please," Iason pleaded.

“Ohh,” Voshka breathed. “You’re finally calling me Vosh. I’ve been waiting for that. Come now, Iason, a bit of release would do you good.”

“I feel...I don’t want to....” Iason stammered, unable to articulate his thoughts; the Commander’s hand had moved down his abdomen and now slid beneath his trousers to apprehend the Blondie’s growing erection.

Iason gasped. “Please. Please stop.”

“You don’t want me to. Anyway, I can’t.” Now Voshka stood up, tossing his cape aside, and began undressing. His eyes were now wild with arousal as he looked down at Iason. “I need to fuck you. Oh but...this time, I want to taste you, my lovely Amoian.” As if to emphasize this, the Commander gave his lips a little lick.

Iason closed his eyes, trembling.

“Don’t fight it,” Voshka whispered, now standing completely naked before him. He held out a hand. “Get undressed. Let’s try out that hot tub. I suppose you’ve guess by now...Alphazeniens have a...fetish...for water. It makes us quite deliciously horny.”

A fetish for water. The image of Raoul with Anori in the hot tub now pressed into his mind. Suddenly Iason was struck with a thought. “This...implant. You are the only one, then with such a device?”

“Yes. Well, except for my brother, of course. He was the one who...convinced me I had to get one.” Voshka smiled, remembering. “That was right after he seduced me, you see.”

Iason was so shocked at this, for a moment he could not reply.

“Oh dear. I’ve quite shocked you, I can see. And you’re quite right to be so. We have the same prohibitions as you do, on that count. That’s why I decided I had to have an implant, too.”

Finally, after fifteen years of anger and resentment at Raoul, Iason finally understood. Raoul had been seduced by Alphazeniens technology, just as he had. That this revelation should come in the Observatory, in the exact place where Iason had discovered Raoul’s illicit union—with Anori, Voshka’s brother, was so bizarre that he found himself feeling a bit light-headed.

“Those...devices...ought to be banned,” he whispered.

Voshka smiled. “Come, Iason. Let’s get into the tub.”

But Iason turned his head away, refusing to look at the Commander.

“Ah. I see. You’re going to...make this a challenge.” Now Voshka fell to his knees, pushing Iason’s thighs apart and unfastening his trousers to reveal the Blondie’s rigid erection. “Then, perhaps I’ll taste you, right here.”

With that, the Commander’s hand encircled Iason’s shaft, his tongue exploring the head in slow, deliberate circles.

Iason groaned, loudly. “Stop,” he commanded, reaching out to grab hold of Voshka’s wrist. He gripped him so tightly that the Commander was forced to release his hold.

Voshka sat back on his heels, perplexed. “Why are you resisting? You’re clearly aroused.”

“I already told you. I don’t want to hurt Riki.”

“But you...promised a night with me,” Voshka reminded, quietly.

“A made a promise first to Riki,” Iason answered, “which now I’m going to remember.”

“Then, you’re breaking your promise to me?” Voshka demanded.

“Yes.”

The Commander sighed, then stood up, tugging his trousers back on with obvious displeasure. “This is most vexing,” he said, finally.

“I apologize,” Iason replied, fastening his pants and his tunic.

Now Voshka sat down on the divan next to Iason, slouching down like a school boy as he sulked over his lost night of congress with the beautiful Blondie. “I must admit, I’m rather put out by it.” He turned to look at Iason, a slight smile turning the corners of his lips. “You really ought to be punished.”

Iason made no reply to this, somewhat encouraged by the Commander’s smile.

“You love your pet that much, then?” he asked, after a pause.

Iason nodded. "Yes."

Voshka shook his head. "This is a first. I confess, my ego is a bit bruised. Bested by a pet."

Iason smiled at this. "Surely you know it is not a matter of...physical attraction. You saw how my body responded to you."

The Commander laughed a bit at this. "Thank you for your diplomacy." He sighed, allowing his head to fall back against the divan as he stared up at the blue sky. "I fell in love with a pet once," he remembered with a smile. "A pretty little thing from Aristia."

"What happened to him?" Iason asked, relieved to get the Commander onto another topic.

"He...escaped, actually. That was years ago."

"And you...never saw him again?"

Voshka shook his head. "I went to Aristia to look for him, but never did find him."

The two men continued to talk for awhile, the tensions easing between them. Eventually Voshka, who was of an agreeable disposition generally, fully forgave Iason for retracting his promise, deciding there was still a chance he could seduce him. Perhaps it was too soon after their encounter in the shower; he would back off a bit, and then try to charm the Blondie again.

He saw that Iason was still visibly upset over his pet's outburst, and so he decided the best way to interest the Blondie was to speak to this issue.

"Your pet—Riki? He...is rather high-spirited, I take it."

Iason nodded, smiling.

"Then, I wouldn't take to heart anything he said down there. He was angry; once his anger fades, you'll be able to win him over."

Iason made no reply to this, looking a bit uncertain. For the first time in a long while, he doubted his ability to garner Riki's forgiveness. "I don't know," he said, finally.

"Oh yes. Everyone has his price. You just need to determine what it is he wants."

"He wants to be freed," Iason replied. "But...I can't give him that."

“Of course not,” Voshka agreed. “But surely, there is something else. Has he ever asked you for something special? Perhaps it was something you refused him before?”

Iason thought for a moment. The only thing that came to mind was Riki’s repeated requests to tie him up.

Voshka studied him. “What is it? You’ve thought of something, I think?”

“There is something,” he conceded, hesitantly.

“And...that would be?” the Commander prompted.

“He has, on several occasions, asked if he could...tie me up.”

A smile crept onto Voshka’s face at this. “Is that so? And...why do you suppose he would want to do that?”

Iason laughed. “Oh, I have no doubt. He intends to punish me, certainly. Which is why I keep putting him off.”

“Oh my.” Now Voshka had renewed respect for the mongrel and was suddenly seized with an extraordinarily provocative idea. Excited, he sat up straighter, smiling. “Then...perhaps you ought to let him have his way with you.”

Iason started to object, and then stopped, considering. If it would win back Riki’s heart....

Voshka studied him, his eyes gleaming. “You can take it,” he whispered. “And you can make up your broken promise to *me* by letting me watch.”

After considering the matter for a few moments, Iason finally agreed.

“Excellent,” Voshka replied, trying to hide his utter delight. “Now. I have an idea about how to approach your pet on this.”

* * *

Aki woke up feeling extraordinarily drowsy, having slept in later than usual. He had found it exceedingly difficult to fall asleep the night before in his excitement over his birthday. He crawled out of bed, too disoriented to remember the importance of the day, and padded to the kitchen, yawning.

Everyone was up, waiting for him, gathered around the table. When the boy made his entrance, still in his pajamas, hair wildly unkempt, he was greeted with smiles and laughter.

“Well now. Look who finally decided to get up,” Omaki teased, softly.

Without replying, Aki crawled up onto his master’s lap, wanting to be held as the fog of sleep slowly dissipated.

“Good morning, my love,” the Blondie whispered, pulling him close and kissing the top of his head. “And...happy birthday.”

At this, Aki suddenly stiffened, remembering that it was, in fact, his birthday. Smiling, his eyes were drawn to the tiny ring sitting on the table. “Is that it?” he yelled.

The others laughed at his excitement. “Yes,” Omaki replied. “That is it.”

“Play it,” Aki demanded, beside himself with excitement.

“Very well. Now remember, Aki, this will only play once. Are you quite sure you’re ready?”

Aki nodded furiously, eyes wide. His heart was beating wildly. He was about to be addressed...by Jupiter.

“Then...here we go.” Omaki reached out, picked up the ring and spun it around. For a moment, the ring appeared to be a golden sphere, and as the spinning slowed and the ring began to settle back down on the table, it suddenly lit up, projecting a hologram above the table.

Aki gasped at his first—and probably only—glimpse at Jupiter, who seemed to be looking directly at him.

“Aki, number U-004M. I greet you. Today you are formally recognized as a citizen of Amoi. Aki, you have been given special status. You are Unclassified. You are now the ward of Iason Mink, who will supervise the remainder of your education. As a citizen, you are expected to conform to all laws articulated the General Code and to uphold your designated station with dignity, with special attention to Sections U001-900 and E499-700. You are to be admitted to the Eos Academy for Elites for formal training in an apprenticeship of your choosing. You are eligible to apply for

admission into the Academy of the Amoian Guards on your twelfth birthday, should that option appeal to you. As an Elite, you are granted all the privileges that come with my most favored class of citizens. Congratulations.”

After this brief appearance, the hologram flickered and then abruptly disappeared, leaving only the ring now motionless on the table.

Aki was so excited he could barely speak. “Special,” he breathed. “Jupiter said I’m special!”

“Of course you are,” Omaki whispered, trying to hide his profound disappointment. He had felt his heart sinking when Jupiter gave him his identification number—Unclassified. He had hoped for a pet class of some type; but then, when Jupiter spoke of Iason and the Academy, he realized that Aki could not enter the Elite Academy with a pet identification. So, an Unclassified number made perfect sense. But then, when Jupiter announced that Aki was an Elite and eligible for military training, he felt all his hopes fading away.

Aki was to be an Elite. Not a pet. He frowned, puzzled. But then, why was he Unclassified? He pondered this for a moment, and then decided that this classification, in fact, worked to his advantage. Perhaps this meant Aki could still be a pet. In his heart, he knew that no Elite had ever subsequently become a pet and that, therefore, it was extremely unlikely that Aki would become his pet, but he couldn’t bring himself to face this reality. He clung to the hope that, somehow, Aki would choose to come back to him, would willingly decide to be his pet, for he couldn’t bear the thought that it would not be so.

Now Aki protested, as Omaki had unconsciously begun to hold him closer, squeezing a bit too hard. “You’re suffercading me,” he complained.

Omaki smiled. “I am sorry, Commander Aki.”

Aki beamed at this appellation. “Jupiter says I can join the Guard!”

“Yes,” he conceded, trying his best to smile.

“And...she says I’m a Leet!”

Ru, Kahlan and Enyu all laughed at this.

“Congratulations, Aki,” Ru laughed. “You’ll be a wonderful Leet.”

“Yes, congratulations,” Kahlan said, smiling. “So that was Jupiter, huh? What did you think of her?”

“She was...X-tordernary,” Aki whispered.

Omaki smiled at this, kissing the top of his head.

“It truly doesn’t play again?” Enyu asked, puzzled by the concept.

Omaki shook his head, picking up the ring. “No. One time only. Hold out your hand, Aki.”

The boy did so, and Omaki slipped the ring onto his fourth finger of his left hand.

“Don’t ever lose this. It contains your identification chips, and from here on all records concerning you will be stored with your number.” Omaki couldn’t help but notice that Jupiter had chosen to give him a finger ring—yet another sign that he was destined for something other than pethood. Only Elites wore their identification in the form of finger rings.

Aki nodded solemnly, admiring the shiny iridescent ring for a few moments. He then seemed to notice for the first time the scroll that also was sitting on the table. “Is that my Certificate?”

“Yes,” Omaki said. “Would you like to open it?”

Aki nodded, and the Blondie handed him the sealed scroll. Aki held it for a moment with reverence, then carefully broke the seal. The Certificate replicated in writing what Jupiter had told him in his birthday greeting, acknowledging him formally as a citizen of Amoi and reiterating his status and privileges. It bore Jupiter’s stamp, three interlocking triangles of gold, which glimmered on the page.

“On my planet,” Kahlan said, hopefully, “we have a special dessert to celebrate birthdays.”

“Is that a hint?” Ru demanded, smiling. “But I just made an Aristian chocolate cake.”

“But...it’s gone now,” Kahlan pointed out.

“I want a cake for my birthday!” Aki yelled, excited.

“Hush,” Omaki scolded. “Do you think you can ask in more polite fashion, the way a newly acknowledged citizen would?”

Aki immediately put on an air of such dignity and reserve that it was all the others could do to keep from laughing.

“Might I please have a cake, on this, my birthday, Ru?” he asked, solemnly.

Kahlan bit his lip at this to keep from laughing.

Ru bowed. “I suppose that could be arranged, Sir Aki. And what type of cake would you like?”

“Aristian chocolate cake!” Aki yelled.

“Aki,” Omaki sighed, but couldn’t help smiling at the boy’s excitement.

“But I just made one,” Ru protested.

“But we ate it,” Enyu pointed out.

“Wouldn’t you prefer something different?”

“No! Aristian Chocolate,” Aki proclaimed, and the others nodded in agreement.

Ru shook his head. “Very well. Aristian Chocolate it is. But first, are you ready for breakfast, Aki?”

“Yes, please.”

“Now,” Omaki said, as Ru rushed to bring the boy his food, “what do you say that today we go out somewhere, just you and I, wherever you want?”

“Anywhere I want?” Aki replied, eyes widening.

“Yes. That is, anywhere on the planet.”

“Oh,” Aki replied, his hopes to visit one of the border planets dashed. He thought for a moment, his brow furrowed as he contemplated the choices.

Omaki waited, wondering what the boy would pick, and trying to keep a smile on his face, though he felt as though his heart was breaking. This was his last day with Aki, the last day before his young would-be pet was sent to live with Iason, and part of him feared that this was, in fact, the end of his dream, and that, little by

little, the boy would begin to drift further away. He closed his eyes, wishing he could hold Aki, just so, in his arms, forever young, and forever his love.

* * *

“I can walk,” Yui protested, as Raoul carried him inside.

“Hush,” the Blondie replied, though he couldn’t help smiling. He was thrilled to be finally bringing Yui home, now fully restored.

Yui had gone through hell, enduring every one of the prescribed Acceleration treatments despite their agony, refusing Raoul’s repeated suggestions that he abandon the treatment.

Raoul was so impressed with Yui’s resolve that he was determined to make it up to his Furniture-Pet, planning to pamper him in every way possible. He would even...cook for him, he decided. Then he frowned. He wasn’t really sure how to cook. But then, how hard could it be? He’d call up the holographic chef for help.

Pixie darted into the room, so excited about the return of Raoul and Yui that he began playfully running around Raoul, batting at his pant leg and meowing.

“Pixie,” Yui exclaimed, smiling. “Did you miss me?”

As if on cue, Pixie mewed loudly, looking up with wide, round eyes.

Yui giggled. “Were you a good kitty?”

“No, he wasn’t,” Raoul replied, grumpily. It had taken the housekeepers a good hour to clean up the mess made by the tiny ball of fur. “He knocked everything over and broke my Ghevoenichi vase.”

“Is that true, Pixie?” Yui scolded, shaking his finger at the tiny feline. Pixie raised a paw, as if to bat the proffered reprimand finger.

Raoul placed Yui on the divan, and Pixie immediately leapt up onto his lap, purring loudly.

“Naughty kitty,” Yui whispered, sternly, though he couldn’t suppress a smile, especially when the kitten seemed to deliberately settle down on his new organ.

“He IS a naughty kitty,” Raoul agreed. “And perhaps I need to punish YOU for allowing him to misbehave.”

“But,” Yui protested, now opening his eyes wide, “I’m still quite weak.”

Raoul smiled at Yui’s ploy. “Then perhaps I’ll save your punishment. But, as soon as you’re completely healed, I’m turning you over my knee.”

“But...that’s not fair,” Yui pouted, playfully.

“I’ll be the judge of what’s fair,” Raoul growled, gifting him with a stern look.

“Ow,” Yui winced, when Pixie dug a claw into his trousers.

Raoul immediately picked the kitten up, tossing him to the floor. “That’s my territory,” he announced, eliciting a giggle from Yui.

Raoul smiled, placing a hand gently on Yui’s new bulge. “How does it feel? Does it still hurt?”

“Not really,” Yui said. “Just when he...clawed me.”

“Have you...felt anything yet?”

Yui shook his head, looking a little concerned.

“Don’t worry. Heiku says it will come naturally. We can’t rush it.” He leaned closer, kissing Yui on the forehead. “Are you hungry? I’ll make you brunch.”

“You’ll...make me brunch?” Yui repeated, suspiciously.

“What? Surely it can’t be that difficult. What would you like?”

“Umm,” Yui hesitated, trying to think of the most innocuous thing possible. “Maybe...toast?”

“Toast it is. And I’ll make you eggs and bacon, and hotcakes, too. How does that sound?”

“Yummy,” Yui admitted, his stomach growling at the thought. But could his Master actually cook?

“Now you just...lie here,” Raoul ordered, pulling Yui’s legs onto the divan, “and call me if you need anything.”

Yui nodded, smiling as the immense Blondie made his way to the kitchen. He put his hand over his mouth, stifling a giggle when

he heard a good deal of crashing and cursing. Pixie jumped back on this lap, insisting on being petted.

In the kitchen, Raoul couldn't find the switch for the holographic chef, and rather than humiliating himself by asking Yui where it was, he decided to attempt to figure things out on his own. He found a basket of eggs in the refrigeration unit and so cracked them—all thirty—into a bowl. He peered at the immense mass of yellow liquid, wondering if he had made too much. He dug around until he found a skillet, slamming it onto the stovetop. Now he stared at the stove, wondering how to turn it on.

"On," he commanded.

Nothing happened.

"Eggs," he tried.

In the great hall, Yui was giggling furiously as he heard his Master talking to the stove.

Raoul frowned. "Breakfast?"

He studied the stove, then realized there was a digital panel on the front. So. Not voice-activated. "Piece of junk," he mumbled, as he started pushing random buttons.

All the burners came on at once, startling the poor Blondie. He cursed, pushing the "0" button repeatedly as though this would somehow turn the stove off. When this failed to accomplish his objective, he decided to ignore the additional flames and go ahead and cook his eggs.

He had poured the entire bowl into the skillet before he realized there were far too many eggs to fit. The eggs spilled all over the stovetop, running down the front of the oven and into the open flames, sending up great spirals of smoke.

"Blast," he cursed, staring at the mess and feeling a bit desperate.

"Push the red button—the one that says, Off," Yui suggested, smiling.

"What are you doing up?" Raoul demanded, though he took Yui's advice. The additional flames immediately disappeared and a fan came on, sucking the smoke up into a vent.

“Master. You don’t know how to cook.”

Although Raoul hated to admit it, he knew that Yui was right. He stared at the stove, a bit appalled by the mess he’d made. “I’ll call down to the kitchens and have the housekeepers come up,” he grumbled, then turned and picked Yui up, carrying him back to the divan. “And I told you to stay put. Didn’t I?”

“I had to make sure you didn’t burn the house down,” the boy retorted, grinning.

“Hmmm. I had things under control.”

“It didn’t look that way to me.”

Now Raoul leaned forward, so that his forehead touched Yui’s. “Are you challenging my authority?” he demanded, with mock sternness.

“No, Master,” Yui giggled.

“Good. Because if you’re well enough to walk into the kitchen, you’re well enough to be punished.”

“Am I well enough to go the party tomorrow?” Yui asked, anxiously. He had been asking Raoul about it for the past few days, but the Blondie hadn’t made up his mind on the issue.

Raoul sat back, considering him for a moment. “I suppose so,” he conceded, with a smile.

“Thank you, Master,” Yui cried, leaning forward to kiss Raoul on the cheek. He was quite excited about the party, despite feeling a bit jealous of Iason. He so rarely had the opportunity to socialize with other Furniture or pets. He was truly looking forward to the event. Additionally, he wanted to keep an eye on his Master when he was around Iason—not that he could really do anything. But Yui had worried that he would be left at home while Raoul went to the party—left alone to go out of his mind with worry and jealousy.

“Now. I’ll call the kitchens, and we’ll have some food sent up. How does that sound?”

“Wonderful,” Yui replied, grinning.

“All right then.” Raoul got up and went to the communications center, smiling at Yui’s excitement. His kiss had given him an erection, and now he wondered how long he would have to wait

before Yui began to feel sexual arousal. He was so anxious to take him to his bed that he could hardly keep his hands off the boy, and his fingers trembled a bit as he called down to the kitchens.

Soon, he thought. Very soon.

* * *

Riki went through the gamut of emotions, from rage, to hurt, to grief, and then back to rage again. He couldn't believe that Iason had broken his promise. He sat, head in his arms, wishing the world away.

Only when Toma was punished was he momentarily lured out of his own despair. Katze led Toma to the table there in the great hall, whipping the taming stick out from his sheath.

"Lower your pants," Katze ordered. "And put your palms on the table."

"Please, Katze," Toma pleaded.

"I don't want to do this," Katze replied. "But I have no choice. Obey me, Toma."

Toma fumbled with his pants, allowing them to fall to his thighs. He looked back fearfully at Katze.

"Palms on the table, Toma."

With great reluctance, Toma obeyed, whimpering when he heard Katze smack the taming stick against one hand. "You'll take 15 strikes. Do not move from this position, or I will add 5 additional strikes," Katze warned.

Fifteen strikes? With a taming stick? Trembling, Toma slowly put his palms on the table, wishing he were anywhere else in the world but in the great hall of Iason Mink, about to be punished.

When the first strikes came he blinked, unable to believe how much it hurt. He bit his lip, trying not to cry out. But it was not long before he was unable to hold back, vocalizing his anguish with every strike.

Katze punished him thoroughly; he had learned that if he attempted to hold back, Iason would call him on it, re-

administering the punishment himself and forcing Katze to endure a few punitive strikes. But he stopped at 15, glad that Toma had managed to hold his position for the duration of his discipline session.

“You may rest in your room for one hour,” Katze said, softly.

Sniffing, Toma pulled up his pants, his face red from emotion and shame. He scurried from the hall, wiping the tears from his face.

Riki scowled at this, finding one more reason to hate Iason. He was so deep in thought he did not notice when the Commander came toward him, stopping at a safe distance away, then leaning against the wall.

“What the fuck do you want?” Riki demanded, startled when he finally saw Voshka.

“I’m here as a messenger of sorts. Iason has sent me here to...negotiate on his behalf.”

Riki frowned, momentarily at a loss for words. “I don’t negotiate with...dickheads,” he replied, finally.

Voshka smiled. “Indeed. A wise policy. But perhaps you should hear the terms first.”

The mongrel was somewhat mystified by the situation, glaring at Voshka to hide his confusion. Negotiations? Terms? What was Iason up to now? What game was this?

“Iason has conceded that you are owed some sort of compensation for your grievance,” Voshka continued. “So, he has agreed to submit to your punishment.”

Riki blinked, not quite daring to believe what he was hearing. Slowly, he rose to his feet. “To my punishment,” he repeated.

The Commander smiled. “I thought that might garner some interest. Yes. He has agreed that you are entitled to administer the punishment of your choosing—within reason. I will be observing to be sure things don’t get too far out of hand.”

Riki’s eyes narrowed at this. “You will be observing?”

“Yes. Now,” Voshka lowered his voice a bit, “you needn’t worry. I have no intention of interfering with...your agenda.” He smiled, his eyes shining.

Katze and Tai, who were there in the hall, exchanged glances of disbelief at this conversation. Katze shook his head, marveling at Iason's genius.

"Hmmm." The mongrel fell silent for a moment, his eyes locked with the Commander's. Whether it was Voshka's offer or the man himself, Riki suddenly felt strangely attracted to him, eyeing him openly.

Voshka noted his surveillance, intrigued. His gaze lowered to the mongrel's groin and, detecting the slightly enlarged bulge there, he smiled. "Of course, if you *want* me to interfere—in whatever way—I would be happy to assist you. I have a taste for discipline, I must confess."

Now Riki smiled, a slow, wicked smile that matched the dark gleam in his eyes.

* * *

Iason was face down on the bed, his wrists and ankles manacled firmly to the bedposts. He was completely naked, his beautiful pale skin bared for punishment. Riki paced in front of the bed, now dressed—at his insistence—in black leather pants and a tight black tank, free of his chains. He carried a C-1 kasey, the same whip Iason had used on him at Dana Burn, which he tapped threateningly against his leg.

Commander Khosi sat slumped in a chair in the corner of the room, watching, a devious smile curling his lips.

After a few moments of pacing, Riki stood before Iason, hands on his hips. "Do you have anything you'd like to say before I punish you?" he asked, his voice low and dark.

"Yes," Iason replied. "I am sorry, Riki. I should not have broken my promise to you."

Riki stiffened a bit at this, crossing his arms on his chest. "No. You shouldn't have," he agreed. Then he leaned down, looking into Iason's eyes, a cruel smile teasing his lips. "But now you'll pay for it."

“Riki,” Iason began.

“Silence!” Riki commanded. “The time allowed for speaking is past. For the next few hours, you’ll do as I say. Is that understood?”

For the next few hours? Iason strained to see if Voshka was still in the room. Surely the Commander would not allow things to carry on that long, he reasoned, forcing himself to relax.

Riki was now teasing him with the kasey whip, dragging the tip of the thin, flexible rod the length of the Blondie’s body, then between his buttocks, and along the inside of his thighs. After a few moments of this, the mongrel stopped, enjoying the sight of Iason so vulnerably positioned, waiting to be punished at his hand. It was a moment he had fantasized about countless times, and Riki was determined to savor every second.

He squeezed the handle of the whip, his anger now channeling into his arm. Iason did deserve to be punished—thoroughly—not only for breaking his promise, but for all the times he’d made him suffer. Now, finally, the mongrel had a chance for some pay back.

And he would show no mercy.

Voshka watched Riki’s performance, privately applauding the mongrel’s patience. The pet knew just how long to wait to build up anticipation, to make Iason squirm a bit first. And although the Blondie did not technically “squirm,” he was sure that Iason at least felt some apprehension about what was coming.

In fact, Iason was fascinated with his pet’s whole demeanor. Since the punishment had not begun, he was not in any sort of pain, and he couldn’t help but be intrigued by a side of Riki he had never before seen. Perhaps he would even enjoy being punished.

This last thought was immediately discarded once the punishment began. Riki rained down a series of brutally hard strikes to his buttocks and thighs, the thin whip tearing into his skin. Iason frowned, finding it quite unpleasant. Although he made no sound, he certainly felt each and every strike; moreover, as the punishment continued, the pain seemed to get exponentially worse—there was a cumulative effect he hadn’t anticipated. He

clenched his muscles against every strike, hoping for a quick end to the torment.

Riki was delighted; although Iason didn't cry out, he knew the Blondie was in pain by the way his muscles twitched and quivered. He poured two years of suffering and built-up resentment into his arm, giving his Master a sound whipping.

Finally he stopped, mostly because his arm had begun to cramp. "Did you feel that?" he whispered, then crouched down before Iason to look him dead in the face. "Yes. I think you did. However, I hope you don't think your punishment is over." He leaned over, nuzzling Iason's cheek before whispering in his ear. "No. We've only just begun."

With that he stood up, disappearing from Iason's view for a moment, and then returning with a long, ominous-looking paddle.

The Zephyr 2000 Burn.

Iason stared at the implement, hoping that his pet only meant to tease him. But Riki had other plans. He flipped the unit on, switching it to G-wave emission.

"Riki. I hope you don't think...you're going to use that on me."

"What did I tell you?" Riki demanded. "Shut the fuck up!"

"Vosh," Iason tried. "Please. This...is going too far."

"Oh, I'm quite looking forward to a good paddling," the Commander replied. "No, I'm not going to interfere. This is splendid."

Riki shot Voshka a grin, and the Commander rewarded him with a wink.

"Do you hear that?" Riki taunted. "Your loverboy wants to see you suffer, too."

"I could call Ayuda," Iason threatened. In fact, the bodyguard had been most disapproving of the whole punishment scenario, asking Iason repeatedly if he was sure he was willingly submitting to it.

"Go ahead," Riki replied. "We both know you won't. That Blondie pride of yours would never allow it."

Iason fell silent; his pet was right—he couldn't call for Ayuda to come and release him. Then everyone in the household would know he had caved, and his authority would be forever destroyed. It was bad enough that he was submitting to this ridiculous discipline session—he couldn't beg for mercy. He was a Blondie. Blondies didn't beg. No, he had no choice but to take whatever Riki had in mind for him.

He waited, his body tensing up as Riki began pacing again. His eyes were locked on the paddle; he had never been struck by such a thing, and he was, in truth, a bit anxious about it.

Finally, Riki stopped, and with a mighty swing, gave the Blondie his first whack. Iason closed his eyes, forced to submit to a pain he could never have imagined possible. He understood why the paddle was called “the Burn,” for he felt as though his buttocks were on fire, his cheeks hot and throbbing from the impact of the paddle.

“I think you felt that,” Riki remarked, tauntingly. He spun the paddle in the air, catching it and then bringing it down for a second strike.

This time Iason gasped.

“What was that?” Riki leaned closer. “I do believe you made a sound that time.”

The Blondie opened his mouth, his lip quivering ever so slightly.

“Or...perhaps I'm mistaken. Let's see.” Riki struck him again, eliciting another sharp gasp from the Blondie.

Thrilled, the mongrel twirled the paddle in the air again, but this time dropped it. “Fuck,” he grumbled, glancing at Iason to see if he had noticed his error.

He heard Voshka laughing and he turned around, glaring at him.

The Commander raised a hand, shaking his head. “Forgive me,” he apologized. “It was...quite funny, however. Please. Continue.”

Iason was in too much pain to find Riki's fumble amusing. He braced himself for more punishment and was not disappointed;

Riki continued with the paddling until the Blondie was almost prepared to plead for mercy.

Iason's ass and thighs were so red that Riki—almost—felt sorry for him. But then he remembered the Blondie's transgression, and hardened his heart. He wasn't finished with Iason yet. No. Now he would make him suffer in other ways.

Next, he got the G-strap, flipping it on with a flick of his wrist, the sharp crack actually startling Iason. Riki smiled at this, cracking the strap a few times for effect. "Now let's see how you like the G-strap, Iason." With that, he proceeded to give the Blondie a thorough strapping. Though Iason still refused to cry out, his hands were now clenched in fists, and he couldn't help but gasp with each strike. Beyond the pain, the G-wave emission from the paddle and the G-strap were having their intended effect, and Iason was now uncomfortably, incontrovertibly aroused.

Riki shut off the G-strap, throwing it aside. "I'm ready for you now, Vosh," he announced, smiling at Iason's expression.

The Blondie frowned when he saw the Commander approach his pet, then put his arms around him from behind, sliding his hands up Riki's thighs to his crouch.

"What are you doing?" Iason demanded. "Vosh!"

"Oh, this is part of your punishment," the Commander replied, smiling. "Your pet asked me to participate, and I agreed."

Riki smiled triumphantly at Iason, unzipping his pants and guiding Voshka to his waiting erection.

"Stop...stop this at once," Iason whispered, furious.

"You're not in a position to be making demands," the mongrel replied, gasping when Voshka began stroking him, kissing his throat as he did so. Riki closed his eyes, enjoying the sensations and—most of all—Iason's anguish.

The Blondie watched jealousy, feeling helpless. This wasn't at all what he had in mind, and now he felt extraordinarily incensed with Voshka, who he felt had tricked him. To make matters worse, Iason was now painfully aroused, the performance before him only increasing his discomfort.

“All right, Commander,” Riki ordered, giving Iason a little grin. “Get on your knees and suck me.”

Voshka obeyed, smirking at Iason as he knelt down before the Blondie’s pet and began to pleasure him.

At first, Riki deliberately exaggerated his reactions to infuriate Iason, but it wasn’t long before his moans were genuine.

“Holy fuck,” he whispered, allowing his hands to run through the Commander’s soft hair.

“Stop this,” Iason hissed.

Riki gazed at the Blondie through half-closed eyes. “How does it feel, Iason?” he whispered. “Watching me get pleased by someone else? Perhaps now you understand...how I felt.”

Iason fell silent at this, watching his pet’s increasing excitement and finally, his climax, through jealous eyes, finding this part of the punishment more of a torment than all that had gone before.

But the punishment didn’t end there; for several hours, Riki and Voshka tormented the Blondie sexually. They released his ankles from the manacles and forced Iason to get onto his knees, both of them fondling him and licking him, arousing him almost to the point of orgasm and then stopping. Riki would then punish Iason with a few more strikes of the G-strap, and they would start again, frustrating Iason so dreadfully that he finally pleaded with Riki for release.

“You...want me to let you come?” Riki whispered. “But...how would that be punishment?”

Now Voshka, who had been enjoying the discipline session immensely, suddenly decided that he was finished playing. He undressed, kneeling behind Iason and, without any preamble, began fucking him.

“I didn’t say you could fuck him,” Riki pouted.

“The game’s over,” Voshka replied. “I have my limits, too.”

“Fuck him hard then,” the mongrel grumbled.

The Commander was happy to oblige him, and Riki continued to fondle Iason, eliciting rasping cries from the tormented Blondie, who was now desperate for release.

This time, though, the mongrel miscalculated, failing to stop before Iason reached his critical point. Groaning, the Blondie finally expelled his pent-up seed, just as Voshka reached a similar conclusion.

“You weren’t supposed to come,” Riki muttered, wiping his hand on the bed.

With a moan, Voshka withdrew. “All right. I think...that’s punishment enough.”

Riki sulked a bit at this, having quite a different view on the subject.

“Please, Riki,” Iason pleaded, softly. His entire backside was throbbing; besides this, the Blondie had a pressing need to attend to which urged a trip to the bath hall.

Thrilled that the Blondie had finally begged him for mercy, the mongrel relented. “All right. But,” now he stood up, opening a drawer in the dresser to retrieve a pack of smokes, “I’m taking these back now. And I’m going to have a smoke before I untie you.”

Voshka got dressed, giving Iason a little grin. “I must confess...I’ve rarely spent an afternoon more pleasurable.”

Iason frowned at this, feeling more than a bit annoyed with the Commander.

Riki yawned, stretching his arms. “I’m starving. When’s dinner?”

A Party to Remember

Snow had begun to fall, swirling down upon the city in spirals of cold beauty. Still in his skintight black sleeveless tank, Riki relaxed on the balcony ledge, enjoying the feeling of the cool air on his overheated skin. After working up a magnificent sweat punishing Iason, the chilly evening night felt refreshing. He took a deep drag from his smoke, sighing.

“Oh yeah,” he groaned, closing his eyes and letting his head fall back against the wall behind him. Finally, after days of deprivation, he was in possession of an entire pack of Dark Baccalias, and he intended to enjoy as many as he could before they were confiscated again.

And...he had no doubt they would be confiscated. In fact, he wondered what else Iason would do to him. He knew he had gone too far with his punishment--and that he would most likely pay for it.

Yes, he would pay--but it had been worth it, watching his “Master” take his punishment, forcing the Blondie to submit to HIS will, for once. He knew that, if given the opportunity, he would have disciplined Iason again, just as severely. He smiled, replaying the episode over and over in his thoughts.

It had been nearly perfect, beginning to end. Since almost the very day he had come into Iason’s household, he had harbored thoughts of turning the tables on the sadistic Blondie. Punishing him had surpassed all his fantasies, satisfying deep longings he had nourished in the private terrain of his mind for over two years.

The whole experience had left him feeling almost giddy. A sense of relief, of triumph--even forgiveness, washed over him now. No matter what Iason demanded of him in the future, Riki would always be able to replay the afternoon in his mind, to remember the few sweet hours when he had been Master. And so the mongrel felt, in some important way, that Iason could never really own him, could never really be his Master, for what sort of Master submits to his own pet?

He gazed out at the city below as the lights began to flicker on. Tanagura was especially beautiful at sunset, illuminated in vibrant hues--blues, purples, reds, greens--a myriad of colors and movement as the city came alive with the night. Although the falling snow blocked the view of the setting sun and rising moons, the effect of the whirling white against the colorful city lights was breathtaking.

It was a fitting end to an amazing day. His only disappointment had been his inability to make Iason cry out. But, perhaps that was too much to ask. Iason had, finally, asked him to stop. That was enough.

Besides, the slum-hardened mongrel couldn't help but respect Iason for his refusal to utter a single cry. Though every muscle in his body had strained and quivered under the torment of Riki's discipline, Iason had retained his dignity to the very end--even with the application of Accelerator. His stoicism had been downright impressive, no question; in fact, it even shamed Riki a bit. He was now resolved to toughen up the next time he was put under his Master's arm.

Which, he felt certain, would be soon.

Riki was so deep in thought that he failed to notice when Iason approached him.

"Riki," Iason whispered, softly.

Riki yelped, startled, almost dropping his smoke. "Fuck! You bloody scared the crap outta me!"

"That was not my intent."

“Dammit, you’re always doing that,” Riki grumbled, glaring at him.

“Oh?”

“Yes. I am going to get you a bell. I should make you wear it on your cock, the way you make me wear a ring,” he added boldly, not wanting to seem apprehensive about what he knew was coming.

But as he eyed Iason, he realized that, surprisingly, the Blondie did not seem angry. Nor did he seem to be...in pain.

“Hmmm. What did you do, pop an O-6?” The mongrel took another drag off his smoke, envious of Iason’s ability to avoid any sort of post-punishment discomfort with his stash of Elite-grade pharmaceuticals.

“You’ll get sick again out in this cold,” Iason scolded, ignoring him. “Come inside.” The Blondie had, in fact, already taken an O-6, but that was not so much to assuage his pain as it was to ensure that he did not appear to be in pain. It would hardly do for the Master of house to look as though he had been punished.

“Let me finish my smoke,” Riki pleaded. “Anyway, the air feels good. I like it.”

Surprisingly, Iason seemed to acquiesce, giving a slight nod as he contemplated the city below. For some moments they were both silent. Riki tensed, sensing that Iason was about to announce his punishment. Feeling a bit nervous, he threw his spent smoke over the ledge and started a second, hoping Iason wouldn’t notice.

The Blondie was not so easily distracted. “You’ve finished your cigarette. It’s time to go inside now.”

“Just one more, please?” Riki pleaded. “I haven’t smoked in days.”

“One is enough.”

“Please, Iason? I’ll suck you off real good later. I promise. I’ll make your toes curl.”

Despite himself, and after having only recently released, Iason felt blood rush to his groin at Riki’s provocative offer. The mongrel was giving him his best drop-dead sexy look, his eyes glittering

seductively, his chest muscles flexing beneath his skintight, sweat-drenched tank. Riki bit his bottom lip, smiling.

Iason moved a bit closer. "Is that so?" he whispered, leaning down to nuzzle his neck. "And what if I have other plans for you?"

"Wha...whatever you want," Riki answered, trembling a bit from arousal and, now, chill. "I'm yours tonight."

"I want you to be mine every night," Iason whispered in his ear. "I know."

"Riki." Iason slid a hand beneath the mongrel's shirt, up to his nipple, which he caressed, just the way he knew his pet liked.

"What?"

"Kiss me."

"Ah! Your hair almost caught fire!" Riki yelped, evasively. "Let me...finish this smoke."

Iason answered this by confiscating the smoke and tossing it over the ledge.

"Hey!"

"I told you, one is enough."

"You can bloody well forget that blow job, then!"

The Blondie pulled his pet down from the ledge and pushed him up against the penthouse wall, pressing his body against him as he slid his hands down to his waist. "You'll do whatever I want," he insisted. "If I want you to perform fellatio, that's what you'll do. And right now I want you to kiss me."

"You have shitty timing when it comes to romance," Riki muttered. "Asking me that when you just pissed me off! You--"

Iason silenced him by forcing his mouth open, capturing his tongue with his own and kissing him deeply. After a moment he pulled away, frowning.

"You taste of smoke."

"Shithead! What do you expect? I was just smoking."

"Riki," Iason whispered, kissing his neck again and thrusting his body up against the mongrel.

"We just fucked, you know. I don't get sprung that easy. Not like you." Despite his protest, his breathing deepened as Iason

continued to kiss his neck and caress his nipple with a gloved finger. "Why...did Jupiter make you Blondies so perverted and horny anyway? If she doesn't want you to fuck, I mean. Ah! Stop...stop doing that."

Iason had slipped his hand down the mongrel's pants and activated his pet ring with his mere touch, forcing his pet to respond. "Stop? If I want to take you, pet, I'll do so whenever and wherever I want."

"Ow! You fucking bit me! Whaddya do that for?"

"Just tasting you, love," Iason whispered.

The mongrel tried to push him away, and Iason smiled, grabbing hold of his wrists and then pinning them to the wall above his head with one hand. "I hope you're ready for your punishment," he whispered, fondling him for a few more moments before finally releasing Riki's cock and removing his hand from his pants. "You must know it's coming."

"Hmmm." Riki turned his head away as Iason continued to nibble and kiss his neck. "I was...justified. You shouldn't have fucked him and you know it."

"The Commander...has a device embedded beneath his skin. It emits G-waves."

Riki listened to this, his eyes narrowing. "Are you trying to say that's why you fucked him?" he demanded, a bit crossly.

"Partly." In fact, Iason was now so aroused he was tempted to take his pet right there on the balcony, despite the cold and the snow. Or perhaps it was more his desire to make Riki submit to him again, to show him who was Master, that fueled his passions.

"If you're saying this device is why you fucked him, why didn't it affect me the same way?" Riki demanded. "I'll admit, Voshka's sexy as hell, but I know I could have resisted him."

"I don't know why. I only know...it affects me."

"If that's true, then you can't promise you won't be with him again, can you? He'll probably be fucking you night and day!"

"It's possible," Iason conceded.

“Well, fuck! You know what I think? This device? That’s a bloody cop-out. You could resist if you wanted to. You’re attracted to him. We both know it. Aren’t you?”

Iason was silent for a moment.

Riki laughed. “I guess that means yes. You fucked him because you wanted it.”

Now Iason released his arms, sighing. “Partly. But--it is more complicated than that, Riki.”

“How? How is it more complicated?” Riki demanded, suddenly feeling angry.

Iason looked away, as though sorting out his thoughts. When he finally spoke, his voice was softer. “Even before that happened, I had agreed to his...advances. But I did it to protect you. He wanted to take you to his bed, so I offered myself as...I guess one might say, as a proxy for you.”

The mongrel frowned at this, too proud to admit that he didn’t know what “proxy” meant.

“Hmmm.” He ran a hand through his hair, uncertainly.

“You’ll recall I told you he would decide your punishment,” Iason continued. “And that was what he requested--a night with you in his bed. But,” now the Blondie turned to him, “I’ll not share you with anyone, Riki.”

“But you promised me you wouldn’t fuck him,” Riki reminded him, his eyes shining darkly.

“Yes. That was...very wrong of me to make such a promise. It is impossible to predict what might happen in the future. The future...is never within one’s control.”

“If that’s true, it’s pointless to ever make a promise or an oath.”

Iason nodded. “Perhaps.”

Riki scoffed at this, leaning back against the wall and crossing his arms on his chest. “I may have grown up in the slums, but the one thing I had was my word. When I gave my word, it was as good as my blood. Shit. Any mongrel can tell you that. It’s part of the code.”

Iason was silent for a moment before replying. "Among the Elites, we have a different sort of...code of conduct. It is called reciprocal equality. When...a grievance is done to one of equal standing, it must be compensated in some manner."

Now Riki shook his head, perplexed. "So?" Something about the look on Iason's face made him shiver--that and the cold.

Seeing him shudder, Iason frowned. "You're getting chilled. Come inside now."

"But I want to finish what we're talking about."

Now Iason shook his head, firmly. "Later. Right now there's something else we need to take care of." With that, the Blondie took Riki firmly by the elbow, leading him inside.

"Okay okay!" Riki growled. "You don't have to drag me, I'm coming already. But I need to take a piss."

The door to the penthouse hummed open and Iason pulled his pet inside, leaning down to him. "Very well, Riki. Go do what you need to do. And then I expect you to report to me promptly in the great hall. You know why."

"Yeah, whatever," the mongrel muttered, rubbing his elbow where Iason had held him. The Blondie's firm grip didn't bode well for what was coming, and Riki wondered if there was anywhere in the penthouse he could hide.

"Don't even think about delaying," Iason added, as if reading his thoughts. "It will only be worse for you. You were deliberately naughty today and now it's time for you to take your punishment."

"I said okay," Riki snapped back. "I can't help it if my body has to do certain things."

Satisfied, Iason turned and left the mongrel staring after him as he went to join the Commander in the great hall.

"Fuck," Riki groaned. He was not looking forward to whatever it was Iason had in mind for him. He made for the bath hall, dragging his feet.

* * *

Guy's heart began to pound a bit faster when he saw the vehicle. As he approached, even through the falling snow, he could tell that it was Kei's. And from the snow piled on it, it had most definitely been sitting there for days.

"Kei!" He pulled up alongside the vehicle, trying to peer through the darkened windows, but was unable to see anything. He got off his bike and punched in the codes to the door, anxiously waiting while the door lifted open.

But Kei wasn't in the car. Frowning, Guy looked toward Dana Burn, wondering why Kei had stopped at the old forbidden shelter. Had he gone inside? Then, why had he parked so far away?

He got back on his bike and sped towards the entrance, ignoring his hunger and weariness. He had been searching for Kei for days without food or rest, and was now completely frantic. He knew it was unlike him to disappear without telling him where he was going. And the fact that Kei had disappeared the same day that Riki had run away--at least from what he'd heard--convinced him that the events were somehow related.

If he was right, Kei had gone out in search of Riki to try and secure the reward the Blondie had posted. Kei hadn't answered his phone, though, in days--and since he carried an independent handheld, there was no way to trace it. It had been purely by chance that Guy had thought to search Dana Burn. He had been on the way to Urus when something compelled him to turn off the road and go to the old site of the revolution. Now he realized his hunch had been right--but why had Kei stopped at the old haunted shelter? Was this where Riki had been hiding?

The alert for Riki had been called off; apparently he had been found, though no details were offered over the airways. Now Guy approached Dana Burn with trepidation, worried about what he would find within. He knew that finding Kei's vehicle abandoned was an unpromising development. He was now trembling as he reached the entrance to the shelter, surprised to find it open.

Shutting off his bike, he got off, pulling out his knife. He peered inside the darkness, his attention caught by a greenish light

emanating from within. He noted the radio by the door and the remnants of a fire, stepping past them both.

Someone, at any rate, had been there.

“Kei?” he called, uncertainly.

But for the echoes of his voice through the deep corridors, only silence answered him. Slowly, he crept toward the green light, finding that the generator-powered lights had been activated in one of the rooms, bathing everything in it with a low, eerie, unworldly glow.

There was nothing in the room of interest, save a state-of-the-art generator heater and a brand new lantern, both recent models. He picked up the lantern, turning it on and then searching deeper in the old structure, making his way down dark hallways that had not been explored since the revolution.

But despite all his efforts, he found nothing that would help him understand what had happened to Kei. He only knew now, with certainty, that something was very wrong.

* * *

“Do I look like a Leet?” Aki demanded, tilting his head back proudly to show off his new earring. It was a single piercing, permanent, filled with a small hoop of shiny platinum-hued Aristian gold.

Omaki smiled, finding the modification to his precious would-be pet rather fetching, despite his initial reluctance to agree to Aki’s ear piercing proposition.

“But all the Leets have one,” the boy had wailed, staring up at his Master with such endearing fervor that the Blondie had, at length, been forced to relent.

It wasn’t that Omaki was against piercings; quite the contrary. No, but he had hoped to be the one to instigate Aki’s virgin piercing, and he had one or two thoughts about where that piercing would be.

Though it wasn’t true that all young Elites had one ear pierced, many did, and Omaki wanted Aki to feel he fit in among the

youngsters, many of whom might possibly target the newly declared Elite as an outsider, an oddity in a very structured, rather unchanging society. In all his days, Omaki had never heard of anyone not born an Elite proclaimed one later by Jupiter.

While he still harbored hopes that the boy would still become his pet, already the Blondie realized that it was highly unlikely--even laughable--that Aki would choose pethood over Elite status. So he had agreed to the piercing, much to Aki's complete delight.

Aki stood before him, standing proudly, dressed only in his pajama bottoms, then climbed up on Omaki's lap.

"Do you really like it?" he asked again, staring up at Omaki and thrusting his chest out, for some strange reason.

Omaki laughed. "Where is your pajama top?"

"It's too hot."

"It's the middle of winter, Aki."

"But I get hot when I'm excited."

"Hmmm." The Blondie's mind immediately suggested several inappropriate replies to this innocent remark, all of which Omaki managed to keep to himself.

"But you like me pierced, right?"

At this, Omaki's gaze lowered to the boy's exposed nipples, and he couldn't help but imagine a similar piercing there, through one of Aki's pink, pert little nipples, a wave of arousal rushing over him as he contemplated the thought. "Oh yes," he whispered, his voice a bit thick.

"You're getting bumpy again," Aki announced, deliberately squirming around on the Blondie's developing erection.

"I suppose that's because," Omaki whispered in his ear, quickly adjusting him on his lap to a more comfortable, safer position, "you bring out the bumpy in me."

Aki giggled at this, his laugh bringing another smile to his Master's lips. "So did you have a good time today, my love?"

"Oh! It was...the best day in my entire life," the boy proclaimed solemnly. Omaki had taken Aki throughout the city, wherever the boy wished to go, and had bought him lots of new clothes, such as

the uniform he would be required to wear at the Academy (an activity that Aki had shown surprising interest in), as well as various toys--anything Aki pointed out and said he wanted, including a hover-board and a new Alphazanian laser. They had eaten frozen creams, slid down the Taming Tower slide together several times, and had taken a holopic together at the Arena, where they had visited all the worlds of the Quadrant in the holoprojected walk-through museum.

"I just wish this day would never end," Aki added, suddenly yawning.

"But you must sleep," Omaki replied, leaning down to kiss his nose. "You have a big day tomorrow."

"That tickles," Aki protested, wrinkling his nose and then rubbing it furiously. He yawned again, closing his eyes.

"You see? You are falling asleep right here on my lap."

"I am not," Aki protested, without opening his eyes.

Those were the last words of the happy little Leet, who promptly fell asleep in his Master's arms. Omaki held him for a long time, his smile fading as he contemplated what was coming.

He did not want to let Aki go. And he found that, now that the boy's departure was imminent, his buried anger and resentment toward Jupiter was starting to break loose from the place deep inside where he had been trying to contain in.

He hated Jupiter. Hated her with everything within him. She had taken away his best friend. And now she was taking away his little love.

Enyu watched his Master from the shadows, frowning. He was waiting for Omaki to put Aki to bed, knowing full well that the Blondie would need immediate release, as he always did when he held the boy. But he hated the look of longing his Master had when he looked at Aki, knowing that Omaki had never looked upon him so.

Enyu had nothing against Aki, personally. In fact, it was hard not to like him. But he was glad the boy was leaving. The Xeronian had come to feel quite jealous of his Master's obvious affection for

the little “pet,” and he was anxious for his competition to be gone. Then perhaps he could win Omaki’s complete attention. Maybe he could even make the Blondie forget about Aki.

In his heart, Enyu knew this was very unlikely. He knew his Master loved Aki. But he also knew that he no longer served his Master simply out of loyalty or because it was what he was required to do. He loved his Master. And he wanted him for himself.

* * *

“So. Have you come to give me the boot?” Voshka asked, smiling from a chair in the great hall, where he was comfortably situated when Iason entered the room.

“I should,” the Blondie replied, wryly. “As you well know.”

“Ah. Is there hope?” the Commander’s eyes twinkled. “I was certain I had done myself in.”

Now Iason sat down opposite the Commander, turning to Toma, who stood waiting for his orders. “Wine, Toma. And the Commander will have...?”

“Wine, as well.” Voshka replied, nodding. “So. You’re forgiving me?”

“You don’t deserve to be forgiven,” Iason replied, unconsciously batting his eyes.

Somehow, despite all that had happened--or perhaps because of it--the two men felt surprisingly comfortable together, more like old friends. The awkwardness both of them had anticipated was simply not there, and Iason found, much as he felt Voshka deserved it, that he could not dislike the Commander. There was something about him that was impossible to resist, a sort of charisma that immediately put the Blondie at ease the moment he was in his presence. Although he should have been furious with Voshka, he found that he was not, and he supposed that this had something to do with why the Commander had been successful in all his military endeavors. He was simply a man that others wanted around, and who would be forgiven for nearly every transgression.

When he looked up, he saw that Voshka was studying him, his intelligent eyes dark and glimmering, his lips curled in a seductive half-smile.

“Oh my. You really...have no idea how sexy you are, do you?”

“Please, Vosh.”

“So. You’re still calling me Vosh,” the Commander answered, grinning, then lowering his voice. “I must say, you’ve fueled my fantasies for the next year to come. That afternoon was...quite spectacular. I don’t suppose there’s still a possibility of that night together? Perhaps you’d like to punish me?”

“Forget it, Voshka.” Riki sauntered into the hall, hands in pockets. “You’ve had your fuck. Hands off.”

“Then how about you join me tonight?” the Commander replied, eyeing Riki with unfeigned delight.

“I think not,” Iason replied, quickly. “Pet. Come here.”

“Aren’t you going to chain me up?”

“Oh, surely that isn’t necessary, now that we’re all good friends,” Voshka countered.

Riki approached his Master and, preparing to climb onto his lap, was stopped by Iason. “Sit at my feet,” he commanded, pointing at the floor.

Riki narrowed his eyes at this, frowning. “How come?”

“Do as I say, Riki,” Iason replied, sharply.

In fact, the Blondie did not want his pet to sit on his lap because he was sporting an erection just being near the Commander, a perplexing development that he did not want Riki to discover.

The mongrel slid to the floor, scowling, his arms crossed defensively over his chest.

“Now. We have to decide how you will be punished, Riki.”

“If WE are going to decide, how about I get no punishment?” Riki shot back, saucily.

“After what you pulled this afternoon, you know full well that is not an option.”

“Then why isn’t HE getting punished?” Riki demanded, gesturing to Voshka.

“He’s quite right. I should be punished,” the Commander replied, winking at Iason.

“Well fuck. That’s not punishment then, if he wants it.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Iason replied. “Besides, the Commander...is a guest in my home.”

“Oh, don’t stand on ceremony on my account. I’m up for whatever you have in mind for me, love.”

“Don’t call him that,” Riki grumbled. “He’s not your love.”

“Pet, you’ll not address the Commander openly,” Iason scolded.

“What, after I watched him lick your ass and fuck you? I can’t talk to him now?”

“Hush,” Iason whispered, sharply.

“He has a point,” Voshka laughed. “Although, I’m hoping he’s going to put on that delightful outfit again.”

“Your wine, Master,” Toma said, handing Iason his wine, and the Commander his.

“Always serve guests first, Toma,” Iason reprimanded, softly.

Blushing furiously, Toma bowed. “Yes. Of course, Master. I am...sorry.” He backed away, feeling foolish and upset that he had made another blunder.

Now Riki looked up at Iason, a pleading look in his eyes. “Don’t make me put that thing on again. Please. Anything but that. Those little chain-mail things hurt.”

“Very well,” Iason replied, trying to suppress a smile, as he uncrossed his legs. “There is a silver outfit in the bottom drawer of my dresser. Put that on. And there is something else in the drawer. Please bring it.”

Sighing, Riki got up, making his way to the bedroom.

“I do apologize. I know I let things get too far out of hand. But,” now Voshka lowered his voice to a whisper, “I daresay you enjoyed *some* of what we did together, Iason.”

“Hush,” the Blondie replied, a bit nervously.

“Ah. I see. You want to...hide that from your pet? But it is hardly a secret. He was there when you climaxed. And now I know what you like. I’d like to explore you a bit more...with my tongue. You liked that, didn’t you? A nice tongue-fucking, isn’t that what does it for you?”

“Please.”

Now Voshka leaned forward in his chair, reaching out to put a hand on Iason’s knee. “Let me make it up to you tonight,” he whispered, his eyes shining. “I haven’t had a chance to explore you completely. Let me love you tonight. And you can do whatever you wish to me. I submit to you, Iason.”

“Stop, Vosh.”

“You know you want to. Are you worried about Riki? Bring him, too. We’ll have him crying out to the gods within the hour.”

Iason, despite himself, was becoming uncomfortably aroused by Voshka’s offer, by his touch, by his mere presence, by the suggestive look in his eye. But he did not want to share Riki with anyone, including the Commander.

“Come on, Iason. I can take punishment, if that’s your wish. Punish me. Do whatever you want to me. Please. Come to my bed.”

“No,” Iason insisted, glancing anxiously toward his bedroom door. “Stop...stop touching me.”

“I can’t help myself,” Voshka protested. “I’m half tempted to pick you up and ravish you right now, there on that dinner table.”

Iason reached out and seized Voshka’s wrist, pushing him away. “I told you, no.”

“Just one kiss then. I never got to kiss you in there.” Voshka stood up, putting his hands on the arms of Iason’s chair and leaning close. “Come, just a taste.”

The Blondie turned his head away, now angry. “No, Vosh!”

The Commander took advantage of Iason’s bared throat and began kissing him there. “You see? You’re angry. You want to punish me. I told you, you can do whatever you want.”

Ayuda and Anders stood nearby, watching. The scene was making Ayuda nervous, and he took a step forward when Voshka stood up. Anders put a hand out to stay him, shaking his head.

“Do not interfere,” Anders whispered.

“I’ll interfere if I deem it necessary,” Ayuda shot back.

“The Blondie is capable of taking care of himself, no? He’s in no danger.”

Ayuda clenched his teeth, feeling a bit angry with Anders and very uncomfortable about the whole situation. He had been beside himself when Iason had agreed to the preposterous punishment session; to the experienced bodyguard, Iason Mink’s decisions seemed absurd, dangerous, and demeaning. He hated that the Commander seemed to have made the conquest of Iason his project, and he hated it even more that Iason was not--in his view--resisting as strenuously as he should. It made his job of protecting the Blondie very difficult.

Voshka let a knee rest on the chair between Iason’s legs as one hand reached down to grope the Blondie’s now obvious erection. “You can’t deny this,” he whispered, continuing to kiss Iason’s neck. “Why do you resist me? Give in to your desires.”

At that moment, a loud cry startled them both, and Voshka broke away.

“What the fuck! You’ve got to be bloody kidding!” Riki shouted, having just discovered the outfit Iason intended him to wear. It was a pair of silver low-riding shorts, with a large round hole on the back cut out, leaving the ass deliberately exposed. And next to it, in the drawer, was a paddle.

Iason smiled at Riki’s reaction, giving Voshka a push with his foot. The Commander fell back in his chair, grinning, holding his hands up. “All right, all right. Just consider my offer.”

Riki came to the door of the bedroom, one hand on his hip. “I’m not wearing it,” he announced, hotly.

“You most certainly are,” Iason corrected him. “It’s time for your punishment. Surely you didn’t think I would wait long, after what you pulled this afternoon? I suggest you hurry, because the

longer it takes you to come back in here, the worse your punishment. And be sure you bring the paddle.”

Sighing loudly, Riki turned and disappeared into the bedroom, cursing under his breath.

“Oh, lovely. More punishment? I hope I get to watch?” Voshka sipped his wine, smiling.

“I ought to turn you over my knee,” Iason shot back.

“Would you? Please, I’d be happy to oblige you. Give me a good paddling.”

“I should,” Iason whispered. “Although, as Riki rightly pointed out, it wouldn’t be punishment if you enjoyed it.”

“I beg to differ. It would certainly hurt, if that’s what you mean. But it would give me satisfaction to see you vent your frustration.”

“Hmmm.”

“So how about it? Come to my room tonight? You and Riki, both?”

The conversation was cut short when Riki trudged into the hall, looking rather displeased with his new “outfit.” Not only was the back cut out, but the front was, as well, leaving his genitals exposed.

Voshka brought a hand to his mouth to suppress a laugh; the pet’s expression was so unenthusiastic that, coupled with the outfit itself, Riki created quite a comical sight, his completely flaccid penis bouncing as he walked. He carried the paddle with obvious reluctance, giving the Commander a dark look as he approached Iason.

“Is he going to watch?” he demanded, one hand on his hip.

“How are you going to spank him in that chair, with the arms?” Voshka asked, curious.

Iason answered that by pressing a small button, which retracted the arms about a foot--just enough to allow the mongrel to easily fit over his knees. He’d had the chair made special ever since Riki’s first spanking, which had proved a bit awkward, requiring the Blondie to sit forward a bit. For this reason Riki--and the others of the household--referred to the furniture as the Spanking Chair.

Voshka nodded, smiling. "Clever. I take it someone gets spanked a good deal in your household?" He winked at Riki, eliciting a glare from the mongrel.

"Oh my. If looks could kill," Voshka laughed. "What about our alliance, Riki?"

Riki opened his mouth to speak but was silenced by Iason, who grabbed his arm and pulled him roughly over his knees, pinning his arms behind his back. Smiling at his exposed ass, he leaned over to whisper. "Now, Riki. I supposed I don't have to tell you that you're really in for it. You might have come to that conclusion on your own, being the smart boy that you are."

"I'm not a boy," Riki snapped. "And I shouldn't be punished like one. Punish me like a man."

"I'll punish you however it pleases me to," Iason replied, letting the paddle rest on his pet's buttocks. "You took advantage of an offer I made to you in good faith. Now you're going to pay for it. And, in case it isn't obvious, you're never to breathe a word to anyone about what happened this afternoon. Is that clear?"

"Get on with it," Riki muttered.

"I'll take just as long as I like. And I suggest you hold your tongue, if you know what's good for you."

"Ow! You don't have to hold my wrists so tight!"

But Iason had increased the strength of his grip because he anticipated he would have to work to keep Riki over his knees once he began his discipline. He intended to give his pet the paddling of his life. It was not so much a matter of anger as it was a necessary step to reassert his authority. And it would be done right there in the great hall, where everyone in the household would hear.

He shifted Riki on his lap until his position was exactly right. He could feel his pet trembling beneath him and smiled, glad that he still had the ability to elicit fear from the proud mongrel.

Voshka raised an eyebrow, enjoying the way Iason made his pet squirm a bit over his knee before beginning. Now the Blondie began twirling the paddling in his hand, as though trying to find which position felt most comfortable. He'd been saving the outfit, and the

paddle, for just the right occasion--when Riki needed a good over-the-knee spanking. This, of course, was the perfect opportunity to try out the new paddle and punishment suit--an outfit that would continue to humiliate his pet for hours to come as his punished ass was bared for everyone to see.

"Now Riki. You know why you are being punished. I'm sure you knew, when you did what you did, that this was coming. I don't feel I am being unkind or unjust to make this punishment a bit on the harsh side, considering the nature of your transgression. Surely you must know that what you've done deserves a hard penalty. You knew what you were doing would bring this result, and I'm not going to disappoint you. So if you find the next few moments especially unpleasant--as I'm sure you will--remember that you brought this punishment on yourself, through your own actions. And I will think twice about trusting you in the future, after the way you betrayed me today. You turned against me and took advantage of my good will. So, my naughty little pet, now you are going to pay for it."

"But I only--"

"Hush!"

With that, Iason brought down the paddle so hard that the resounding whack startled Toma, who had been trying to creep off, the talk of spankings suddenly making him anxious.

"Yow!" Riki howled, immediately forgetting his resolve to remain stoic under Iason's punishing arm.

Iason smiled, bringing down the paddle for a second whack. Already Riki's exposed flesh had reddened, and the mongrel's wail of protest left little doubt that the discipline was proving effective.

"That makes quite a frightfully alarming sound," Voshka commented, spreading his legs a bit and stroking himself openly, his thumb over the bulge in his trousers.

"Yes, it's quite perfect," Iason agreed, softly, and then--WHACK! The paddle came down again.

"Bloody hell! That's good, don't you think?" Riki pleaded, struggling to escape from his Master's tight grasp.

At this, Iason laughed, for the first time in a good while. “You know better than that, pet. That’s but three whacks. We’ve only just begun. By the time I’m finished, I daresay you won’t be doing a good deal of sitting.”

WHACK!

“Fuck! Dammit, Iason!”

WHACK! “Watch your mouth, pet.”

“Ow! Shit!”

Now Iason let the paddle rest on Riki’s darkened flesh for a moment, threateningly. “I think I’ve warmed you up nicely. Now it’s time for the real punishment.”

“What! Oh come on! That burns enough, already,” the mongrel complained, not fully comprehending what was coming.

For a moment Iason was silent, a smile tugging at his lips, as though he was trying to suppress a laugh. “Pet,” he whispered, finally, “surely you didn’t think you’d get off with such a slim punishment as that? No, I am afraid you are in for a bit of a surprise. I was only warming up the paddle so it wouldn’t crack it when I started it on you full force.”

“Ha! Very funny,” Riki growled, attempted to twist around to glare at Iason. “Why don’t you either let me go or get on with it then. Dickhead.”

Voshka watched this interchange with delight, enjoying both Iason’s sadistic toying with his pet and Riki’s absurdly disrespectful backtalk.

“I told you, pet, didn’t I? Watch your mouth.”

“Fucking get on with it!”

“Very well, pet, this once I shall honor your request,” Iason answered, repositioning Riki on his lap again and holding his wrists so tightly against his back that the mongrel yelped again in pain.

“Dammit! I told you, not so tight! You keep--ahh!” The mongrel’s complaint was cut short by the sudden onset of Iason’s punishment, which began, this time, in earnest.

The teasing and rests between strikes was now abandoned for a full-scale assault, a brutal paddling that left no doubt as to Iason’s

true feelings about what had happened that afternoon. The paddle came down hard and fast, and though Riki instinctively tried to escape his punishment by thrusting his pelvis into the Blondie's lap, Iason shifted his position and used his knee to prop up the pet's buttocks so that he received, full force, every bit of his intended punishment.

If ever there was a pet who was paddled thoroughly, it was the miserable mongrel pet now held firmly over Iason's knee. His ass was now blistering red and starting to welt, and Riki was beside himself, howling, groaning, kicking, and struggling in a futile attempt to escape the unbearable torment of his Master's discipline.

In desperation, Riki bit Iason's thigh--a horrible mistake on his part. Furious, Iason yanked his head back by the hair.

"How dare you," he hissed. "Toma! Help me bring the T-stand into the hall. Where is Katze?"

"He's gone to get Daryl, Master," Toma replied, rushing to assist him.

"Please," Riki pleaded, tears now forming in his eyes. "Please, Iason. Don't put me in that. I'm begging you. I'm sorry--I didn't mean to bite you, I didn't know what I was doing."

Iason considered Riki for a moment, then nodded. "Very well. I have something else in mind." He turned to Toma. "Bring me the cords in the top drawer of my dresser, and one of the library chairs. And...find me a die."

"A...die?"

"Now, Toma!"

"Yes, Master," Toma answered, hurrying off to bring the wanted items. He returned promptly.

"Come, Riki," Iason said, as he positioned the chair in the corner of the room, pointing to it. "Bend over the back of the chair."

Riki did so reluctantly, as Iason took one of his wrists and tied it to one of the legs of the chair.

"Tie his ankles to the back," Iason instructed, as Toma watched, uncertainly.

When they were finished, the mongrel was positioned humiliatingly over the back of the chair, secured firmly to it, his punished ass bared for all the world to see.

Iason then proceeded to give him a series of brutal whacks with both hands as Riki openly begged for him to stop the punishment.

"Iason, please," he pleaded, his face nearly as red as his bottom. "Please stop!"

"You want me to stop? You didn't stop, did you?" Iason reminded him, gifting him with a few more solid whacks before finally placing the paddle on the chair just below Riki's face, where he was forced to stare at it. On top of the paddle, the Blondie placed a small 8-sided die, much to Riki's mystification.

Iason returned to his chair to admire his handiwork, satisfied that he had given his pet something to think about. Riki's buttocks were so red and welting that there could be no question he had made his point and fully reasserted his authority.

Voshka smiled, his eyes shining with lust. "I will give you half my Empire if you will come over here and straddle me," he whispered, just loud enough for Iason to hear. "I am about to burst." He stroked his bulge meaningfully, spreading his legs a bit more.

Iason answered this with a laugh, looking away.

"I did not intend that as a joke," the Commander said, a little louder. "That was quite a performance you just gave."

"This thing is digging into my stomach," Riki finally complained, bitterly. "How long do you intend to leave me like this?"

"Until I'm finished," Iason replied, taking a sip from his wine.

"What's this die for?" Riki demanded, his curiosity finally getting the better of him.

"Ah yes. Thank you for reminding me. The second part of your punishment is going to be left up to chance. Everyone in the household will contribute to your punishment, Riki. They will each paddle you, according to the reading of the die."

"What!"

“Oh marvelous,” Voshka remarked, finishing off his wine. “I do enjoy games.”

“Then perhaps you would like to begin, Commander?”

“I would be delighted.”

“This is fucked!” Riki announced, feeling angry and helpless--and utterly exposed.

“Careful, pet. You’re hardly in a position to be throwing about insults.”

Biting his lip with great difficulty, Riki listened to the sound of the Commander’s approach, his boots clipping the floor smartly, now desperately hoping that luck would be on his side. His ass was already burning beyond bearing; the thought of additional discipline was beyond his comprehension.

“Let’s see what the Fates have decided for you,” Voshka whispered, allowing one hand to rest on Riki’s exposed flesh as he scooped up the die and rolled it on the paddle.

“He’s touching my ass!” Riki yelled, hoping to elicit some sort of reaction from Iason.

But the Blondie proved disappointingly unresponsive; although he did not approve of Voshka touching his pet, he did not want to give Riki the satisfaction of hearing him reprimand the Commander.

“Ah! A five! Five strikes it is!” Voshka proclaimed, picking up the paddle with a smile.

Riki cursed as the Commander returned the die to the chair and then moved behind Riki, and with a mighty swing delivered the first of the five strikes.

WHACK!

“That’s one.”

“Fuck!” Riki wailed. “Iason, please!”

WHACK!

“Two,” Voshka said, calmly, smiling at Riki’s reaction.

“Master,” Riki tried, desperate. “I’ll do anything! Please, please make him stop!”

WHACK!

“Was that two or three?” Voshka asked, mischievously.

“Two,” Iason replied, trying so suppress a smile.

“Three! Fuck! It was three!”

“Ah, perhaps you are right. Then this would be....” WHACK!
“Four.” Now the Commander leaned forward to whisper in the miserable mongrel’s ear. “Just one more, Riki. You can take it. By the way, you look irresistible all tied up and bent over this chair.”

“Fuck you,” came Riki’s furious reply.

“For that, I shall make this one especially count,” Voshka replied, twirling the paddling in his hand a few times before taking a step back and striking him with such force that the chair moved forward an inch.

Riki’s wail was so pathetic that Iason decided to give him a rest. He turned to Toma, who was watching the situation with obvious anxiety. “When will dinner be ready?”

“It will be ready within half an hour, Master,” Toma replied, bowing.

“Very good.” Iason replied, giving Voshka a small smile. “Are you hungry?”

“You know the answer to that,” came the Commander’s saucy reply. He returned to his chair, giving the Blondie a meaningful look.

Iason ignored this, pretending to study his wine.

“I see. You choose to tease me. Well then, I must confess, I have an appetite for more than just you. A good dinner would suit me quite well, just now.”

“Master, the pets have arrived,” Toma added, motioning toward the front door, where the new pets were quietly waiting, having come just as Riki was being punished over the chair.

“Ah. Excellent.” Iason turned to Voshka, smiling. “Perhaps you would like to examine them? They’re all Class-A pets, fresh out of the Academy. They’re of the best stock on Amoi. We’re having a private auction tomorrow, once all the guests arrive. Of course, you’re welcome to any of them.”

“Oh my. You’ve certainly found my weakness,” Voshka replied, laughing, rising to his feet.

Upon seeing the five new pets, all males, approaching, the Commander circled them, slowly. "Good heavens. They're spectacular."

"I'm pleased you find them appealing. Perhaps one suits you, especially?" In fact, Iason was most anxious for the Commander to have something to divert his interest. A pet would be a most welcome addition to the household during his stay, and he was now quite relieved he had arranged for the private auction. He smiled, crossing his legs as Voshka studied the pets, enthralled.

Voshka shook his head, laughing. "However can I possibly choose?"

In fact, one in particular had already caught the Commander's attention, an especially pretty little pet with innocent, wide green eyes, high arching brows and shoulder-length reddish-gold hair that seemed to stick out everywhere at once. He was the smallest of the pets, and technically the youngest, and he stared at Voshka with such awe and wonder that the Commander couldn't help but smile.

The pets wore the merest hint of clothing--a thin sort of wrap around their groins, tied at the side. Voshka reached down and untied the boy's wrap, opening it to examine him. The pet showed signs of immediate arousal at this action, his cock twitching and rolling as his erection began to develop under the Commander's watching eye. The boy sweetly, though perhaps a bit robotically, spread his feet a bit and pressed his hands behind his back, thrusting his pelvis forward as if proud to show off his sexual charms. Though like most pets he was nearly hairless in the genital region, a small hint of soft, golden-red hair at the base of his shaft was enough to secure the Commander's decision, for everyone knew that this tiny tuft of hair--the "Pet's Crown"--was a sign of sexual prowess, and that the pet would prove especially inclined toward carnal pleasures.

Pleased, Voshka tied his wrap again, loosely, then took the pet by his chin, turning his head from side to side as though examining his profile.

The small sign that swung against his bare chest bore the numbers A-999M, and the pet, who was known at the Academy for being especially shy and quiet, clutched it nervously, a bit surprised--as were the other four pets--that the famous Commander seemed to be interested in him.

"This one," Voshka announced, still holding the boy's chin. "Your name is Azka."

"Yes, Master," the newly named pet replied, glancing at Iason uncertainly.

The Blondie nodded. "Very good. We can have his ring registered here in your name, if you like."

"That would be perfect. I'm terrible with those sorts of formalities."

"It is not strictly necessary, since I assume you'll be taking him back with you to Alpha Zen? But the ring will have a tracer, which could be useful."

Voshka nodded. "Yes, yes. I'll have this one registered. I lost a favorite pet once, you know."

"Yes, you mentioned it."

Azka continued to stare at his new master, unable to believe he had just been chosen by Commander Voshka Khosi, and that he would be leaving Amoi, bound for the Commander's palace in famous city of Ultanum on Alpha Zen. Further, because Voshka was not Amoian, the boy knew this meant he would most likely pair with his master, a contingency that was always impressed upon pets at the Academy as a possibility, but one which almost never actually occurred. He found he was trembling, his chest rising quickly as his breathing came fast and shallow.

The Commander sensed his anxiety and rested a calming hand on his shoulder. "Don't be afraid," he whispered in his ear.

Comforted by this, Azka instinctively reached out to clutch a bit of the Commander's cape, without even realizing he had done so. Voshka, finding this small movement endearing, smiled down at his new pet, pleased.

“Come, Azka,” he said, taking the boy’s elbow directing him toward his chair. He sat down, pointing to the floor. “Sit at my feet.”

The pet obeyed, dutifully perching at his Master’s feet and looking up, expectantly.

“He’s delightful,” Voshka remarked, reaching out to touch the boy’s soft hair, testing the golden-red silky strands between his fingers.

“I’m glad you’re pleased.” Now Iason turned to the other pets, who waited docilely to be instructed. “You may all go sit by the wall until I call you.” Iason pointed to the corner, near Riki’s training post and chains.

The pets immediately obeyed, sitting down comfortably by the wall and waiting, silently, to be commanded, though they all now stared at Azka a bit enviously. To have been so quickly selected by the Commander was something for any pet to be proud of, and to be named on the spot was every pet’s dream. The four remaining pets, Class A-995M--A-998M, still had hopes of being chosen at the private auction, for it was rumored some of the greatest Blondies in Eos would be coming to consider them. At least, that is what they had been told at the Academy. A private auction in Iason Mink’s home was a rare occurrence, one that had been eagerly discussed for days among the young pets, though none were so foolish to think the great Blondie would give up his exotic mongrel pet for one of them.

Even at the Pet Academy, everyone knew Iason Mink doted over his naughty, slum-harvested pet, the infamous Riki the Dark.

But there was no question that A-999M--Azka--had made off with the best catch of all--the Commander himself--and as the newly acquired pet began to get comfortable at his Master’s feet, he could not help but glance at his peers with a bit of smugness. After all, they had been none too kind to him at the Academy, always teasing him about his wild, unkempt hair and his small, boyish frame. But even the worst of them could not deny that Azka apparently had the goods to interest the handsome Commander

Khosi, and so in the end they were silenced, and were forced to watch jealously from the corner of the great hall.

Now Iason turned to Voshka. "You said you preferred pets with a bit of spirit," he remarked. "You do realize he's an A-Class pet? If you're expecting him to defy you, you're likely to be disappointed. He'll most likely do whatever you tell him to."

"Ah well," Voshka answered, smiling, "perhaps I exaggerated when I said I preferred defiance. There's something to be said for total submission. Besides, this one is special."

Azka, on hearing this compliment, smiled shyly at his new master. Though he was not sure exactly what they were talking about, he was already starting to like the Commander and was anxious to perform for him and please him however he could.

"I hope you will stay for the party tomorrow," Iason remarked. "I think I mentioned to you that Aki, the boy, is quite a fan of yours."

"Then, I hope I will not disappoint him," Voshka laughed.

"That seems unlikely."

"Though I will not be able to stay the entire day, I fear. I have a few matters to attend to tomorrow."

Iason nodded, a bit relieved Voshka would be out of the penthouse, at least for a time. And his new pet would provide a welcome distraction for the sex-starved Commander--at least from Iason's view. The Blondie was starting to tire of Voshka's eternal sex drive and incessant advances.

Fortunately, his new pet seemed to have captured Voshka's complete attention, and Iason--for the first time since the Commander had arrived--finally began to relax a bit, allowing his thoughts to focus on the day ahead.

Soon Aki would be in his household and his charge, a responsibility the Blondie took very seriously. But perhaps even more than this, Iason had chosen his guests very carefully for the Guardianship Party. Four Blondies would join him for the occasion--Raoul, Omaki, Heiku, and Xian. If all went according to plan, he intended to bring up a matter of great importance--one that could

very well prove critical not only to the future of each of them--but to all of Amoi.

“Master, dinner is ready,” Toma announced.

“Ah. Excellent.” Iason reached over and activated the dinner chime, then turned to Toma. “Toma, go and roll the die and see how many strikes Riki will take at your hand.”

“Yes, Master,” Toma answered, nervously moving toward the mongrel. The sight of the mongrel’s bared bottom, red and welting, filled him with compassion.

He rolled a four.

“What did you roll?” Voshka asked, curious.

“One,” Toma lied, much to Riki’s great relief.

“Ah well. The boy is entitled to a bit of luck, after all,” the Commander replied.

“Don’t hold back, Toma. I’ll be able to tell if you do, and then I’ll have YOU over that chair,” Iason warned.

“I’m sorry, Sir Riki,” Toma whispered, as he gave the mongrel a sound whack.

Wincing, Riki managed to hold back his cry, grateful to Toma for his kindness. And so the mongrel spent a miserable evening, earning three strikes from Ayuda, two from Anders, four from Tai, six from Odi, one from Askel and three from Freyn, and eight, from Katze, who had returned home with Daryl and had been summoned back into the hall immediately after putting Daryl into bed.

“How about that?” Katze whispered, upon seeing his fortuitous roll. “Now it’s payback time, Riki.”

His body cramping from the awkward position and his ass now bleeding from his continuous punishment, Riki made no reply when Katze whispered threateningly in his ear.

He waited, trying his best to brace himself for the pain, but when the strikes came, hard and fast, the mongrel wept openly, losing all his composure under Katze’s angry hand. He was in so much pain that he did not notice when Iason stopped Katze at the fourth strike, untying him and carrying him off to his bed, nor did

he comprehend what the Blondie was doing when he slipped a small pill into his mouth and urged him to swallow.

He fell asleep in his bed, whimpering, confused over a slight tickling sensation on his face as the Blondie leaned over him, watching him fall asleep. And as drowsiness and a wonderful relief from the pain slowly washed over him, he was vaguely aware of his Master's voice, or perhaps it was only a dream....

“Your punishment is over now, love. Go to sleep.”

And so, riding in the comforting spell of this reassuring voice that penetrated his consciousness, the mongrel drifted into a deep, healing sleep.

* * *

Riki woke with a start, the sound of laughter and many voices in the distance confusing him. He looked at the clock and realized he had slept all morning. It was afternoon.

He tried to move and then groaned, immediately remembering his punishment the day before. His ass hurt dreadfully; in fact, his entire body hurt, no doubt from being draped over the chair for hours the day before.

He turned his head and saw, with some surprise, a tray by his bed, with a breakfast dome and a glass of juice, and a small pill he instantly recognized.

An O-3.

Thrilled, he immediately ingested it, wondering if Katze had taken pity on him after all. Then he saw the small notecard on the tray and picked it up, reading in disbelief.

Riki,

After you finish your breakfast, please clean up and dress for the party if you are able. You may come whenever you feel ready. If you prefer, however, you may stay in your room. This

medication will help with the pain, but I also applied Accelerator when you were asleep. You were too medicated then to remember, I believe.

Please be on your best behavior today. Remember that you are not to discuss what happened yesterday afternoon. Let's make today a fresh start. I want to talk to you about a few things tonight, my love.

Iason

Smiling, he read the card several times. It was the first “note” Iason had ever written him, and for some reason, Riki felt pleased with it. He decided that it was because the note was addressed to him, made no reference to his being a pet, and because Iason had called him, “my love.” He had even asked him to “please” be on good behavior.

As far as Riki could remember, this was the first time he had ever used this word when addressing him. Always before he had been told exactly what to do. Never “please” or “thank you.” Although, granted, the next line, “Remember that you are not to discuss what happened yesterday afternoon” was written in full Master mode, the line immediately afterward was intriguing: “Let’s make today a fresh start.” He was curious about what Iason wanted to talk to him about, and he was thrilled that the Blondie had left him an O-3. Somehow it made up for the severity of his punishment the day before.

He put the notecard in his bedside table, in a drawer where he kept a few special things, including the pendant he had taken from Kei that he had finally managed to retrieve from Iason, and a handful of paper credits. There he kept also a small marble that he had harbored since he was a child--something that his mother had given him, he believed, and the only token he had to remember her by. When he had a pocket he always carried it. Besides these things

there was also a strange, ancient looking coin with an unusual glyph that he had found once, years before, which he kept for good luck. This small pile of things comprised the totality of his treasure, and he put the notecard with it, not because of the fancy gold-embossed initials I.M. at the top, but because it was from Iason, written more as a lover than as a Master.

It was unlike Iason to offer him pain relief after punishment, and he wondered why the Blondie did so on this occasion. But he was certainly grateful for it. The fact that Iason had taken mercy on him the night before was also something new.

He remembered only one or two occasions--such as at the Emporium--when the Blondie had offered such relief. Reaching out and activating the breakfast dome with a push to the button at the top, he waited while his food warmed again, which took only a few seconds. Then he enjoyed a very substantial breakfast in bed--krevlians, hotcakes, eggs, bacon, biscuits, and coffee, the effects of the O-3 helping to take the edge off his residual pain. He had gone to bed the night before without dinner and found he was famished, and the food tasted so good and he felt so comfortable that he was tempted to simply go back to sleep.

But the penthouse was alive with activity and Riki was not about to miss the chance to socialize with the other pets and Furniture who had come to Aki's party. And he also didn't want to leave Iason alone with Voshka Khosi, who he now realized would use every opportunity to seduce the Blondie. His feelings for the Commander had vacillated wildly back and forth since the previous day, and now he was back to disliking the man, especially after he had so joyfully punished him during Iason's sadistic Paddle the Pet game.

After eating, he got up and showered, wincing and swearing as the water stung his punished flesh. But after examining himself in the steamy bathroom mirror, he realized that Iason must have, indeed, applied Accelerator the night before, for he looked far better than he feared.

As he got dressed, he spent far longer fretting over what to wear than was normally the case. He told himself it was because of the party, and that he wanted to look his best. But deep in his heart, Riki knew he was dressing for Iason. He wanted wear something he knew would be appealing to the Blondie; something sexy that was still his style.

He finally settled in a pair of dark blue, skintight leather pants and a sleeveless, blackish-blue halter that showed off his arms and bare midriff. He picked up one of the chairs in the room a few times to pump up his muscles, and then did a few sit-ups and push ups--just enough to tighten his muscles without making him break out in a sweat.

The mongrel studied himself in the mirror for a moment, satisfied that he had made a good choice but wishing he had something to dress himself up a bit more. Then he remembered his snakeskin belt--the one with the golden snakehead buckle and emerald green eyes--and he put that on.

Still, he felt plain. He touched his throat, wishing for a necklace of some sort.

Then, an odd thought occurred to him. For the mongrel, it was a very odd thought indeed--but Riki suddenly realized the perfect thing he could add to his ensemble that would get Iason's attention. More than that, it would be a way to thank him for his kindness in leaving him the O-3, a way of telling him that all was forgiven from the day before.

He walked over to the intercom and buzzed Tai.

"Yes, Sir Riki? Was your breakfast satisfactory?"

"It was awesome. Tai, I need a favor. Could you bring me my chains--the golden ones with the initials that Iason made for me. See if you can get them to me without his seeing you, but if he asks you what you're doing, tell him I'm going to wear them for the party."

There was a long pause as Tai considered this request, feeling rather suspicious of Riki's claim that he wanted to wear them. "I don't know," he began, uncertainly.

“Don’t worry. I’m going to wear them. Come on, trust me. Iason will love it.”

“All right,” Tai replied, finally, deciding that after Riki’s punishment the day before, he would not be foolish enough to engage in any sort of disobedience. “I’ll see if Toma can bring them to you. I’m really busy at the moment.”

“Thanks, Tai.”

After a few minutes, Toma arrived with the chains, looking equally dubious that Riki wanted them for any legitimate purpose.

“Sir Riki,” he whispered, “please don’t make Master Iason angry again.”

“I’m not going to,” Riki promised, taking the chains, and giving him a wink. “It’ll be okay. I promise. And thanks, Toma. For yesterday. I won’t forget.”

Toma nodded, though he left Riki’s room feeling rather worried about what the notoriously naughty pet had in mind. But he was pleasantly surprised, as was Tai--who had been watching nervously through a crack in the kitchen door--when Riki finally came into the hall, wearing his golden collar and his initialed shackles, a gold chain hanging between them. He walked in proudly, making straight for Iason, who was talking with Heiku and Xian.

Upon seeing his pet approaching in his chains, Iason was so astonished that he simply stopped speaking mid-sentence.

“Master,” Riki said, softly, bowing his head slightly. “I am sorry I am late.”

The Blondie stared at him for a long moment, looking so puzzled that Heiku laughed out loud, a deep, beautiful sound that turned the heads of everyone at the party.

“Don’t tell me you’ve finally tamed your pet, Iason,” Heiku teased. “Even you look surprised.”

“Riki, you may go and visit with the others,” Iason said, softly, ignoring Heiku and offering his pet a look of such love that Riki could not help but smile in return.

Iason was, in fact, so touched by Riki’s willing submission, by his open gesture of humbling himself before him and

acknowledging him as his Master that he found it impossible to attend to the conversation at hand, his eyes continually drifting to his pet. He wished the party was over and that he was alone with Riki. Suddenly he longed, more than anything, to take him to his bed and love him like he had never loved him before.

“So what’s this get up?” Katze demanded, as Riki approached him with a grin. “And what are you looking so happy about? I would have thought you’d be a bit stiff today.”

“No thanks to you, asshole,” Riki retorted, nodding to Juthian. “Hey Ju. How’s it going?”

“Hello, Riki,” Juthian replied, feeling equally confused by Riki’s choice of attire. He would never have predicted that the mongrel would walk into the hall willingly wearing his hated chains. But then...he’d heard that Riki had run away. A lot had happened since he’d been at the penthouse, in only a few days. There was probably a good deal he didn’t know about what was going on between the unconventional Master and pet.

“How’s Daryl?” Riki asked, looking toward the closed bedroom door. “Can’t he join the party?”

“No. He needs to rest.”

“Oh. I see. YOU’RE making him stay in bed.”

“As a matter of fact, I am,” Katze replied, leaning back against the wall, his arms crossing his chest. “By the way, Riki, I don’t consider us even, seeing as Iason stopped me halfway through your punishment.”

“Did he?” Riki blinked, surprised.

“Yes. I suppose he took pity on your punished ass. Not that I would have. You deserved every strike.”

“Prick,” came the mongrel’s saucy, dismissive reply.

“Yeah, rub it in.”

“Punished again, Riki?” Sarius asked, with a little smirk.

Riki frowned at this, giving Sarius a blank look. “Who the fuck are you?”

“Riki, you know Sarius. Heiku’s Furniture?” Katze chided.

The mongrel shrugged, looking disinterested. "I don't remember him."

"Well, I certainly know you," Sarius answered. "And I must say, you haven't changed much. You were just as rude the last time we met."

"Seeing as you're just a lowly Furniture, why would I concern myself with you? Me being a pet and all," Riki teased.

Katze answered that by cuffing him on the arm. "Bastard. What do you think the rest are?"

"I don't know what you are," Riki replied, pointedly. "Are you still a Furniture? Or something else?"

"So, Riki, you think pets have higher status than Furniture? And where did you come up with that?" Sarius asked, raising an eyebrow.

"You call me Sir Riki, don't you?" Riki retorted.

"I don't," Sarius replied.

"Then, Daryl does. And Toma, too. Right, Toma?"

"Well--"

"Idiot. That's only a formality, to show Master Iason respect," Katze answered.

"How does calling ME Sir show HIM respect?" Riki demanded.

"Might I remind you who carries the taming stick," Katze pointed out, tapping the implement in question at his belt, for emphasis.

The mongrel rolled his eyes. "Whatever."

"Sorry to disappoint you, Riki, but I'm afraid you're the low man on the totem pole," Sarius teased. "And I suppose I don't need to point out, you're the only one standing here in chains."

Riki looked around, ignoring him. "So where's the guest of honor?"

"He's not here yet," Juthian answered.

Almost as if on cue, the door chime sounded, and Toma rushed to the foyer.

"Sir Raoul," Askel announced through the intercom, as Toma opened the door.

“Bloody hell,” Riki cursed, under his breath. “What the fuck is HE doing here?”

“My sentiments precisely,” Katze whispered back.

“Fucking asshole!”

“Hush, Riki,” Katze warned. “You’re back in Iason’s good graces. Don’t fuck it up now.”

Riki scowled, especially when he caught sight of the great Blondie. Iason had failed to tell him that his old pairing partner would be in attendance, and the mongrel saw this as a rather inauspicious sign that Raoul had been completely “forgiven” for the Taming Tower incident.

“Welcome, Lord Am.” Toma greeted the Blondie, bowing. “Please come in.”

Snickering at the title “Lord Am,” Riki yelped when Katze leaned forward, painfully pinching his shoulder and neck with his vice-like grip.

“Watch yourself, Riki,” Katze whispered.

“Ow! Fucking let go,” Riki hissed back.

“I’m just trying to save your precious ass,” the auburn-haired youth replied, releasing him. “Don’t ruin the party with one of your little tantrums.”

“Relax,” Riki shot back, rolling his shoulder where Katze had pinched him. “I’m not going to do anything. Fuck! Where did you learn that move?”

Katze smiled at this, sipping a glass of punch with a slight shrug. “Hey,” he remarked, holding up the glass. “This shit is really good.”

Raoul acknowledged Toma with a slight nod and then stepped inside, trailed, a little hesitantly, by Yui.

“Raoul,” Heiku called, loudly, upon seeing him. “How’s Yui doing?”

Raoul cringed a bit at this, feeling a bit awkward to have this yelled across the room, but he quickly realized that Yui’s modification was no secret to anyone there.

“Well, I believe,” Raoul answered, walking toward the Blondies, who all turned to examine the newly restored Furniture.

Yui stopped in his tracks, blushing. It was odd to have the Blondies all looking directly at him.

“Come here, Yui,” Heiku motioned, with his bionic arm.

Yui approached the group of Blondies, bowing his head nervously.

“Are you still in pain?” Heiku asked.

Yui shook his head. “Not really.”

“Excellent. Let’s take a look.”

At this, Yui looked to Raoul, horrified. Surely the surgeon didn’t intend to examine him there, in full view of the others?

Raoul nodded at him, giving him a scolding look as though disapproving of his hesitation. Yui, for the first time, felt a little angry with Raoul. How could his Master not realize he wouldn’t want to expose himself in a room full of people? He approached the group but then stood, head bowed, refusing to move.

“Yui,” Raoul scolded. “Heiku wants to examine you. Unzip your pants.”

Blushing furious, Yui obeyed, but then stopped shy of actually exposing himself.

“Yui. He can’t examine you if you don’t show it to him.” Now Raoul sounded a bit irritated.

“That’s right, Yui, nothing to be shy about. I’ve already seen everything when it was still lying on a tray.”

At this, Yui looked up at Raoul, anger flashing in his eyes.

A bit surprised at Yui’s defiance, Raoul reached down and grabbed hold of Yui’s arm, whispering in his ear. “What’s gotten into you? Obey me this instant, Yui. It seems I’ll have to punish you when we get home. Or shall I punish you here, in front of everyone?”

Yui, frightened of Raoul’s tone and his threat, immediately complied, pulling out his new organ, his cheeks flushing a deep crimson.

“Let’s see.” Heiku bent closer, examining the new organ carefully with his good hand. As if on cue, Yui responded to his touch, his cock swelling and twitching slightly. Heiku smiled at this. “Ah. Very good.”

Raoul, though pleased to see that Yui had shown his first sign of sexual function, was a bit envious that Heiku had been the one to elicit it, however clinical his touch.

Heiku nodded to him. “He’s ready, I believe. Just be careful with him.”

Xian watched this with utter amazement, as did Juthian, from across the room. “Then...he’s going to be normal, now? Like any other male?”

“Oh yes,” Heiku replied, smiling. “Yes, I’m rather proud of my handiwork.” He winked at Raoul. “Nice choice, by the way.”

“You do realize,” Iason said, a bit sternly, “how angry Jupiter will be if she finds out what you’ve done?”

There was a long pause after this remark. Then Heiku turned to Iason, looking him straight in the eyes. “Yes, I realize this. And I’m willing to take that risk. Just as you are, Iason, by continuing to keep a mongrel pet--in the manner that you do--when everyone knows Jupiter disapproves.”

Iason answered this with a cryptic smile, sipping his wine.

“Touché,” Raoul commented, softly. Then he leaned down. “We’re finished now, Yui. You can go and visit with the others.”

Yui nodded, quickly adjusting himself and zipping up his pants and then walking toward Riki and Juthian, his eyes on the floor.

“Well well,” Riki teased. “That was quite a show.”

“Ah yes. Too bad Daryl wasn’t here to see it,” Katze observed, wryly, although Yui did not catch the full meaning of the remark.

Now Riki let his gaze wander to Azka, who stood against one of the walls, looking a bit lost.

“Who is that?” he asked.

“That’s the Commander’s new pet,” Toma replied, joining them. “The Commander acquired him yesterday when...when you...were...busy.”

“Oh. He looks different right-side up,” Riki remarked.

Katze laughed at this, reaching out to give Riki’s ass a little slap. “You looked cute, by the way, all tied up over that chair.”

“Ow!” Riki protested, swatting Katze’s hand away. “Don’t touch the merchandise unless you intend to buy.”

“As if I would waste good credits on your mongrel ass.”

“Perhaps we should invite him over,” Toma suggested.

“Damn. I want some more of this,” Katze remarked, draining his punch and then crunching the ice cubes.

“Me too,” Juthian agreed, having finished his glass.

“Don’t drink it all,” Riki protested. “I haven’t had any, you know.”

“Oh, my apologies, Sir Riki. I will bring you some right away.”

Now Katze turned to look at Azka, motioning to him. “Hey! New pet. Come over here and join us.”

For a moment, Azka looked surprised that he was even being addressed, raising his eyebrows with a questioning look.

“Yes, you,” Katze repeated. “The Commander’s pet, right?”

Nodding slightly, Azka moved forward timidly, looking both pleased and terrified to have been summoned.

“What’s your name again?”

“A-99,” the boy began, then caught himself. “That is, Azka. My name is Azka.”

“I’m Katze. That’s Riki--you remember his ass from yesterday, of course--and this is Juthian, Sir Xian’s Furniture. And this is Yui. He’s Sir Raoul’s Furniture. Or...is it pet?”

Yui blushed at this, smiling at Azka. “Nice to meet you.”

“Hey, speaking of Vosh, where the fuck is he?”

“He went to the convention center,” Azka replied, softly.

“Vosh? You’re calling him Vosh now?” Katze teased. “Exactly what happened yesterday in Iason’s bedroom?”

Sarius raised an eyebrow at this, and Katze nodded. “Uh huh. You heard right. And we’re just waiting for the details. Right, Riki?”

The mongrel shrugged mysteriously, a small smile at his lips. “I’m sworn to secrecy,” he replied.

“Oh right,” Katze laughed. “YOU. Keeping a secret. You won’t last a day.”

“Care to wager on that?”

“You’re on, mongrel.”

“Name your price.”

“All right. You spill it before sundown tomorrow, and I’ll have you over my knee.”

“Deal. And if I don’t, I’ll have YOU over mine. With a paddle.”

“I meant with a paddle, too.”

“You didn’t say paddle.”

“It goes without saying.”

Riki shrugged. “Fine. Since it will be YOUR ass, smart ass.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“Yes, we will.”

Yui, Juthian and Azka looked equally perplexed at this exchange, looking a bit relieved when Toma returned with a tray of punch for everyone. As for Sarius, he couldn’t wait to find out what had gone on between Riki and the Commander--and perhaps Iason--and he was already plotting how to get the wanted information out of the mongrel.

“I love this stuff,” Katze remarked, taking an extra glass. “Hey. I should go take some of this to Daryl.”

“Why don’t you let him come to the party?’ Riki demanded. “He must feel rather left out in there all by himself.”

“I know what’s best for my baby,” Katze replied, winking.

“Aw. How sweet,” the mongrel teased. “For your baby.”

The others smiled at this as Katze blew him a kiss over his shoulder, giving his ass a little shake as he walked off.

“He sure is in a good mood now that Daryl’s back,” Toma remarked.

“Hey. This shit is good,” Riki announced, draining his punch. “And these weird little ice cubes are cool.”

Toma smiled. “I’ll be sure to tell Tai.”

“I like crunching ice,” Riki replied, giggling suddenly for no apparent reason.

The others laughed, feeling equally giddy.

“Shit! What’s in this stuff?”

Toma shrugged. “I’m not sure. I’ll ask.”

“Bring me some more please.”

“Me too,” Yui announced, slamming his empty glass on the tray.

“And me,” Juthian agreed.

Sarius finished off his punch quickly and added it to the tray.

“Find out what the recipe is,” he added. “I want to learn how to make this.”

“All right,” Toma replied.

Azka sipped his punch a bit more slowly, though he smiled at the others, happy that he was included in the fun.

“So, what’s your name again? Aztar?” Riki began, giving the pet a little poke. “What’s it like to be the pet of the famous Commander?” I suppose he ravished you last night. Fucked your little pet ass raw.”

Blushing a little at this, Azka bit his lip, uncertain as to how to reply. He knew that he was not at liberty to discuss what went on in his Master’s private chambers. The truth of the matter was that the Commander had not ravished him, though he had insisted he perform for him multiple times--much to Azka’s delight, for the pet was happy to please his new Master.

“Don’t mind Riki,” Yui advised, leaning toward him. “Surely you’ve heard all about him at the Academy.”

Smiling, the pet nodded.

“What the fuck does that mean? What have you heard?” Riki demanded.

“Oh come now, Riki. Everyone knows all about you,” Juthian teased.

Putting a hand on his hip with mock offense, the mongrel stuck his nose into the air. “I’m sure I don’t know what you mean.”

“Sir Omaki has arrived,” Askel announced over the intercom.

“Excuse me,” Toma whispered, handing Sarius the tray and rushing to the door to admit the Blondie and his household.

“Hey! Why did you give this to me?” Sarius demanded, staring at the tray of empty glasses in confusion.

Yui and Juthian giggled at this, and Riki patted the Furniture’s shoulder reassuringly. “I’m sorry to tell you this, but it looks like you’re the low man on the pole,” he whispered.

“Lord Ghan, you are most welcome,” Toma greeted, with a bow.

“Omi!” Heiku called out. “Get your Blondie ass over here!”

“Nice of you to finally show up!” Xian teased.

“Don’t make me use my whip,” Omaki shot back, nodding toward Raoul and winking at Iason.

At that moment, Yousi stepped into the room, much to Iason’s surprise, for he hadn’t invited the Blondie.

“Yousi!” Heiku exclaimed, equally surprised. “I didn’t know you were coming.”

“Yes, that is...I didn’t know I was coming, either,” Yousi replied.

“He stopped by just as we were leaving,” Omaki remarked. “And so I insisted he come along.”

“Yes, of course, you are most welcome, Yousi,” Iason said, graciously, although the situation was slightly awkward. Yousi had not been invited for the simple reason that Iason had intended to speak to the others about a matter that would perhaps be confusing--or even disturbing--to their old friend.

“Thank you, Lord Iason,” Yousi answered, bowing. “I am sorry to intrude upon your private affair.”

“Nonsense. Come in, come in. And where is the guest of honor?” Iason asked, spying Aki peeking out from behind the safety of his Master. “Don’t tell me you forgot to bring the most important person of all? Commander Khosi shall be so disappointed not to meet the great Commander Aki.”

At this, Aki leapt out from behind Omaki, grinning. “He didn’t forget me!” he announced, happily.

“Splendid. Now I should tell you, Aki, that the Commander has stepped out for a few moments, but shall return in time for dinner, and he is most anxious to meet you. So now, come over here and give me a kiss.” Iason demanded, with a gentle smile.

Looking around the penthouse with wide eyes, the boy proceeded toward his new Guardian boldly, though his heart was beating fast. As he approached, Iason bent down to claim his kiss, and the boy humored him by offering a sweet peck to his cheek.

“And now I shall kiss you,” Iason announced, giving the boy a kiss on the forehead, and then straightening. “Welcome to my home, Aki. I hope very much that you will be happy here.”

“Yes, Sir,” Aki murmured, looking back toward Omaki, who watched this exchange with a mixture of bittersweet emotions.

“Now, this is your party, so why don’t you go over to the punch table and get something to drink and a cookie, and then later we’ll have a nice dinner and you can open your presents.”

“Yes...um...what should I call you?” Aki whispered.

“You may call me Guardian,” Iason whispered back.

“Yes, Guardian.”

The door chimed again, and this time Askel announced, “There is a...little boy who has arrived. He won’t tell me his name.”

“Ah. I had almost forgotten. Aki, I invited a boy about your age to the party. His name is Suuki, and he lives the next floor down. He will be in the same class as you at the Academy.”

Excited, Aki turned and ran to the door to welcome the new guest and for a moment both boys stared at each other, silent.

“Are you here for the party?”

“I think so,” Suuki replied, shyly. He held a present out. “This is for you.”

“What is it?” Aki asked, excited.

“It’s a--”

“Now, you’re not supposed to TELL him what it is,” Toma interrupted, smiling at Suuki. “Here, I’ll take that. Aki will open his presents later, after dinner. Now, Aki, why don’t you and Suuki go get yourself some punch and cookies?”

“Come on!” Aki yelled, grabbing Suuki by the hand. “And then, do you want to see my fish?”

“You have fish?” Suuki asked, a little jealously.

“You can help me feed them. We have to feed them or they’ll die!”

“I had a dead bird once,” Suuki remarked.

“Was it dead the whole time?”

“No, just at the very end.”

“How old are you?” Aki demanded.

“Nine.”

“Me too! Look!” Aki showed off his earring proudly. “I just got pierced.”

“Lucky,” Suuki breathed.

Almost immediately the boys bonded as though they had been friends forever, and Omaki watched them together, pleased. He was glad that Iason had thought to invite someone Aki’s own age to the party. In fact, Suuki was the first boy his own age Aki had been around since Omaki had brought him to Midas. It would be good for him to have a friend.

“Well, if it isn’t catboy,” Riki remarked, as his old rival made his way toward the group, along with Ru and Kahlan.

“Riki,” Enyu acknowledged, arching his brow with a bit of feigned disdain.

“Hmmm. Look who’s all high and mighty now.”

Enyu looked away, ignoring him.

“What’s wrong, cat got your tongue?” Riki teased.

“That joke wasn’t funny the first fifty times you made it,” Enyu replied.

“Ru!” Sarius smiled, pleased to see his old friend. And it seemed, to him, that Ru looked exceptionally well. “I’d give you a hug but...” Sarius shrugged, holding up the tray of glasses.

“Hello Sarius. Are you serving tonight?”

“No!” Sarius protested, as the others laughed. “Toma just ran off and left this with me.”

“Oh, Sarius,” Toma exclaimed, rushing over to take the tray away. “I don’t what I was thinking. My mind...is in knots.”

“No big deal,” Sarius replied, reassuringly, his eyes now locked on Ru and the boy’s delightfully skintight outfit. He was about to

comment on it when Ru put his hand behind a young, rather attractive dark-haired youth, pushing him forward.

“Everyone, this is Kahlan.”

Kahlan was greeted warmly by everyone except Sarius, who eyed him jealously, noticing right away the way Ru’s hand lingered on Kahlan’s back, and sensing, with an anxious heart, that there was something going on between them.

Kahlan gave a slight nod, feeling a bit awkward, especially when he saw the unfriendly look gifted him by Sarius. His gaze drifted over to the group of Blondies, his eye caught again by the beautiful Blondie who had bent down to kiss Aki a few moments before.

“Is that one Iason Mink?” he whispered to Ru.

“Yes, you mean the one with the ivory cape? That’s Sir Iason.”

Kahlan stared at him for a moment, an uncanny sensation creeping over him. This Blondie...this...Iason....

“What is it, Kahlan?” Ru whispered. “You look upset about something.”

Kahlan shook his head. “It’s nothing.” As if to prove his point, he moved behind Ru, putting his arms around him. The others noted this intimacy with a few raised eyebrows.

Sarius, feeling a bit angry now that all his suspicions were confirmed, was struggling to rein in his emotions. Ru had been his closest friend for years...and more recently, Sarius had started to develop more intense feelings for the beautiful grayish-blue-haired youth, feelings that he had thought were being returned. In fact, it had always been something of a game the way they flirted with each other. And now this...Kahlan...had come and spoiled everything.

“So...who are you, exactly?” Sarius finally asked, unable to hold back his curiosity, however bitter. “I don’t recall Ru ever...mentioning you.”

Ru laughed. “I’m sorry. Kahlan is...well, he’s staying with us now. He’s from Aristia.”

“Oh really? Tai will be interested to meet you,” Toma remarked. “In fact, I’d better go see if he needs any help.”

“I’ll go.” Ru offered. “Come on, Kahlan, you can meet him. He’s Aristian, like you.”

“Yeah?”

“Yes.” Ru leaned over to whisper in his ear, “now don’t go falling in love.”

“Too late,” Kahlan whispered back, smiling. “I’m already falling in love with someone. I’m pretty sure, anyway.”

Ru beamed at this, reaching back to take his hand as they walked together into the kitchen, while Sarius stared after them, his eyes cold and dark. He had managed to overhear their whispered flirtation and he was beside himself with jealousy.

And he was especially angry that Ru could seem so insensitive, completely ignoring him as though he did not exist. What bothered him even more was the fact that, from what his eyes told him after examining the Aristian, Kahlan wasn’t modified. Sarius had just been given a rival he couldn’t possibly compete with, without even the slightest explanation or acknowledgement from Ru.

“Someone’s not too happy,” Yui whispered to Juthian, who nodded. It was plain to everyone, except perhaps Ru--and Riki, because he didn’t care about such drama--that Sarius was very upset over Ru’s new acquaintance.

In the kitchen, Tai was frantic, rushing about in a state of panic.

“Ru! Thank Armah! Please, tell me you’ve come to help me.”

Ru laughed. “Of course, Tai. Relax. Oh, but I want you to meet someone. This is Kahlan.”

“Thank Armah. I can finally speak to someone in my own tongue,” Kahlan said.

Tai, who had not been in the mood to meet anyone, even Ru’s special someone, stopped dead in his tracks upon hearing his own language. He turned to look at Kahlan, his eyes wide.

“You’re from Aristia!”

“As are you, I take it.”

“Yes.”

Kahlan smiled, a little puzzled over Tai’s obvious nervousness.

“Although, I haven’t been there for over two years,” he added.

Tai seemed to relax at this, nodding. "I see. What is your House?"

"The House of Tuhn. What's left of it, anyway. And you?"

"Merovia."

Now Kahlan looked a bit surprised. "Merovia, as in...the Royal Merovians?"

Tai blushed, nodding. "Yes."

"My. Should I be bowing, then?"

"No," Tai said, quickly, almost angrily.

"What are you two talking about?" Ru demanded, pouting. "I'm feeling quite left out."

"Just pleasantries," Kahlan replied, laughing.

"Yes, we aren't talking about anything," Tai added, a little loudly.

"Okay," Ru replied, puzzled. He glanced at Kahlan, perplexed.

Kahlan shrugged.

"I'm sorry," Tai apologized. "I'm...I'm not myself. I'm worried about the party, and dinner."

"Tell you what. Why don't I leave you two to do your kitchen magic and I'll go try to make some friends," Kahlan suggested, having the distinct impression that Tai felt anxious around him.

"The cake!" Tai suddenly yelled, when the tiny chime went off.

Ru turned to Kahlan. "All right. Oh! You might tell Sarius to come in here, if he wants to help out."

Kahlan nodded, slipping out of the kitchen, feeling a bit puzzled. It wasn't that Tai was unfriendly, exactly, but there had definitely been something amiss with the Aristian. Kahlan had the distinct impression that Tai was hiding something. And he was royalty...yet working as a chef in a kitchen. Very odd.

"Oh, Tai!" Ru exclaimed, as the fretting chef removed the three large, triangular cakes from the oven. "That smells heavenly."

Tai smiled, relaxing a little. "It's an Aristian Triple Chocolate cake."

"Triple Chocolate! I didn't know there was such a thing. Aki will love it!"

“I hope so. I hope I remembered everything.”

“Well, they look--and smell--wonderful. So,” now Ru lowered his voice a little. “What do you think of Kahlan?”

“Kahlan? Oh! He’s...he seems very nice. So are you...together, Ru?”

“Yes,” Ru replied, with a wide smile.

“Good. I’m happy for you.”

“And what about Odi? You mentioned on the line yesterday--”

“Well, we were going to...be together last night, like I said, but he got called away. There was some security issue and I haven’t seen him all day.”

“Security issue?”

Tai nodded. “Apparently there was a break-in of some kind. In the suite of Megala Chi.”

“Really? That’s a bit odd, isn’t it?”

The Aristian shrugged. “Odi seemed concerned about it. You know, with the Commander being here and all.”

“So you mean, thieves?”

“I think so. Actually, I don’t know anything about it. As I said, Odi just took off when it happened and he hasn’t been back. I doubt he even slept last night.”

“What can I do in here, Tai?” Ru asked, looking around the kitchen.

“Well...you can check the ice chips. The machine broke and...we’ve been chipping them by hand.”

“Oh! Everyone loves the punch, by the way. They want to know what’s in it. Sarius wants the recipe.”

Tai shrugged, looking a little puzzled. “It’s nothing special.”

“And they like these ice chips,” Ru added, opening the freezer. “There’s still plenty.”

“Good. Actually they’re made of peach juice. I thought they’d look pretty.”

Sarius now entered the kitchen, stopping when he caught a whiff of the cake. “Holy shit. That sure smells good.”

“It’s an Aristian Triple Chocolate Cake,” Ru announced.

“Hmmm. I wouldn’t know anything about that. Since I’m not from Aristia.” Sarius gave Ru a pointed look.

Ru laughed. “What is it, Sarius? Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Why do you think? You get a boyfriend and you don’t even call me?”

“I’m sorry. It all happened so recently.”

“Would you two mind just...making sure nothing burns or anything? I have to go...do something,” Tai whispered, suddenly anxious for a bathroom break.

“Of course,” Ru replied, and Sarius nodded. As Tai rushed out the back door, Ru turned back to Sarius. “Don’t tell me you’re mad about it?”

“Now...why would I be angry?” Sarius replied, a little hotly. “After everything...that’s happened between us, you just cut me off without a single word of explanation. No, there’s no reason why I should be angry, is there?”

“Cut you...off?” Ru looked up at Sarius, suddenly blushing. “You mean....”

“Just tell me. Was there never anything between us? All this time, this has just been a game? You truly never felt anything for me?”

“Sarius--”

“You’re just a little tease. Is that it?”

Now Ru, who had never fully comprehended that the flirtation between them had been something more than a game, suddenly felt horrified at the misunderstanding. He shook his head. “Sarius...I never meant to hurt you. Please. I hope this doesn’t ruin our friendship.”

“Our friendship.” Sarius whispered the words, his voice now thick with emotion. “So that’s all I am to you, Ru? A friend?”

Ru swallowed, suddenly at a loss for words. Sarius was looking down at him so intensely that he felt a bit uncomfortable. Reaching out, Sarius stroked the side of his face with a finger. “Are you in love with him, Ru?” he asked.

“Um,” Ru stammered, blushing furiously. “I might be.”

For a moment Sarius was silent. He let his hand fall away. “I see,” he said, coolly.

“Please, Sarius--”

“I’m going back to the party,” Sarius interrupted.

“Wait,” Ru reached out to grab his arm as he turned.

Sarius seized his wrist as though he had been burned. “Don’t touch me,” he hissed.

“Ow!”

“Stay away from me today, Ru. And you’d better tell your boyfriend to stay away, too.” With that, Sarius released him and stormed out of the kitchen, leaving Ru to stare after him.

Back in the great hall, Omaki and Yousi had joined the other Blondies just as Toma had brought them another round of punch.

“Iason! Put that wine down,” Heiku demanded. “You have to try this punch, and we all have to make a toast!”

Iason smiled, obliging him. Although he didn’t care much for punch, the guests all seemed to be raving over it, and now he was curious.

“To Iason, for having such a marvelous party and a nice ass, and to Omaki, for arriving late so that we could all get drunk on the punch before he could hog it all,” Heiku announced solemnly, raising his glass.

“What about my ass?” Omaki retorted, one hand on his hip.

“Your ass is very nice, too,” Heiku conceded. Then he turned to Yousi, giving him a little spank. “Although Yousi has the best ass here.”

At this, Yousi blushed, looking rather surprised and puzzled.

“Now, I’ve been told my ass is nothing to laugh at,” Xian interjected, feigning offense.

“What do you think, Raoul?” Heiku asked. “Which of us has the best ass?”

“We all know his answer to that,” Omaki remarked, wryly.

They all laughed, although Iason looked a bit uncomfortable.

“I daresay you’re blushing, Iason,” Omaki teased. “Your cheeks are pink.”

“Are they? Is that why you prefer his ass, Raoul, for his pink cheeks?”

“At least his isn’t hairy,” Raoul quipped, sending the others into stitches.

“Do you hear this, Yousi?” Heiku demanded, looking grave. “My ass has just been insulted. And I’m sure you can attest, you’ll not find a hair on this fine piece of work.”

With that, Heiku turned around and unfastened his pants, lowering them to bare his beautiful, golden buttocks for all to see.

Unable to resist, Omaki reached out and gave the Blondie a hard spank.

“Ow!” Heiku protested, laughing, as he fastened his pants again, turning around. “You’d better watch out, Omi. I’ll spank you with THIS.” He wiggled his bionic hand threateningly.

“Don’t tease me, love,” Omaki replied, rather seductively. “But if you’re serious, I can fit you in sometime next week.”

“Fit him in where?” Raoul teased.

“I daresay YOU know where,” Omaki replied, batting his eyes. “You’re the one among us who’s put his cock more places than most.”

“Not MORE places,” Heiku corrected. “Just the same place, multiple times.”

“You say that like it’s a bad thing,” Raoul shot back, winking at Iason.

Iason smiled a bit stiffly at this merriment, feeling a bit puzzled over the high spirits of the guests. He looked at the punch, wondering if there was something particular in it. He took a sip and, while agreeing with the general assessment that it was especially good punch, found that there was something rather...familiar about it, though he couldn’t quite place what it was.

“What do you say, Yousi?” Heiku asked, putting his arm around the rather perplexed-looking Blondie. “Shall we take Omi

up on his offer? Have a nice little threesome at the Taming Tower, or at least give him a good spanking?"

"I have some new paddles in," Yousi replied, innocently.

The others laughed, and Heiku reached over and kissed the top of Yousi's head. "You're sweet as ever."

"Now let's see," Omaki calculated, holding up his hand, "You've had Yousi, I've had Megala and Sanyara, Raoul's had--"

"That's enough," Iason interrupted. "Perhaps we ought to adjourn up to the Observatory for the auction."

"Ah yes. Nothing quite like A-class pets, fresh out of the Academy. And if they're anything like that one," now Omaki gestured to Azka, "I'm going to be rather jealous not to be taking one home. Speaking of pets, where's Ima?"

Heiku frowned at this, shaking his head. "At home. She was very naughty."

Omaki laughed. "Oh really? What did she do?"

"She paired with another pet without my permission. And now she's got a useless bug."

The other Blondies looked a bit shocked at this.

"You're getting rid of her, then?" Xian asked.

"Of course he's getting rid of her," Raoul answered, as though there wasn't even a question as to what should be done. "She ought to be thoroughly punished first."

"She will be," Heiku replied, looking a bit angry. He was, in fact, quite upset with his pet, who had only been in his household for a very short time.

"You're welcome to bid today, Heiku," Iason added. "Although you'll have to compete with Raoul and Xian."

Both Blondies looked surprised at this. "What? I wasn't planning on taking one," Raoul announced.

"Nor was I," Xian agreed.

"I expect each of you to take a new pet. And so does Jupiter," Iason said, quietly.

There was a brief silence as the full meaning of this sunk in.

Heiku looked at Raoul. "He's right, of course. For appearances."

"Yes," Omaki added, lowering his voice. "I must confess, there's already a good deal of gossip about you, Raoul. And you, Xian."

"Come," Iason said, turning to lead them upstairs. "They're quite splendid, I assure you."

"I hope they're male," Heiku remarked, bitterly.

"Where are they going?" Yui asked, as the Blondies began heading down the hall toward the Observatory stairway.

"I think they're having the auction now," Toma replied.

A look of confusion flickered across Yui's features. "Auction?"

"Pet auction. Master Iason brought some A-Class pets especially."

"Pets?"

Juthian and Yui exchanged horrified looks.

Upstairs, the Blondies filed into the Observatory, all of them falling silent upon seeing the four pets waiting for them there.

"My my," Omaki whispered.

"They are very nice," Heiku conceded.

Even Raoul and Xian had to agree, both of them finding the young males especially attractive. In fact, Xian, who had finished off three glasses of punch before Raoul even arrived at the party, was started to develop an erection just looking at them. Embarrassed, he sat down on the divan, adjusting his cape to hide his arousal. His efforts were quite unnecessary, given the fact that the other Blondies were struggling with similar urges, each worried that the others would notice.

"I'd like to see them completely undressed," Omaki announced, voicing what all of them were privately hoping.

"Pets," Iason commanded. "Remove your wraps."

The boys all did so, untying their groin wraps and letting the flimsy fabric fall to the floor.

Heiku could not take his eyes off the pet nearest him, a sultry-looking boy with blonde hair and dark brown eyes.

"100,000 credits for this one," he announced, after a moment.

“Are there any other bids?” Iason asked. “Raoul?”

Raoul shook his head. “I’ll take the dark-haired one.”

“Would you like to place a bid first?” Iason prompted, smiling.

Raoul blushed. “Of course. I’ll put 100,000 on him.”

Now Xian, who had been rather taken by the dark-haired pet as well but didn’t want to challenge Raoul for him, turned his attention to the other two pets.

“Xian? Do you see something you like?”

The Blondie shrugged, feigning indifference. “Either of the other two.”

“Surely you have a preference,” Iason pressed.

Xian now felt uncomfortably warm, and looking at the naked pets wasn’t helping. “The one...with the nipple ring,” he whispered.

“And your bid?”

“100,000, as well.”

“Very well. I’ll accept all your bids.” Iason turned to Yousi. “Yousi, are you bidding?”

Yousi shook his head, not wanting to give up Arian, even for one of these remarkable pets. There was too much in his life that was changing, and he didn’t want his pet to change, too.

“Then, this auction is over. Pets, you may get dressed.”

The one remaining pet, A-997M, tried not to feel slighted that he had been passed over, though he found tears forming in his eyes. As he knelt down to put gather his wrap, he caught the attention of Omaki, who approached him.

“You’re a very pretty pet,” he whispered, reassuringly. “If I didn’t already have one, I’d take you home.”

The boy nodded, appreciative of the Blondie’s kind words.

“Now, I have something I want to talk to you all about, and I don’t want anyone distracted,” Iason announced. “So I’ll ask the pets to please go downstairs and join the party.”

“No pairing?” Omaki teased, a little disappointed, as the pets dutifully left.

The others laughed, although they were all equally, rather uncomfortably aroused, and the sight of the pretty pets engaged in coital pleasures would have been too much.

"I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm about ready stain my trousers as it is," Heiku commented, wryly.

"You're not the only one," Omaki replied. "I've been sprung for the last half hour."

"That was because Heiku showed you his ass," Raoul teased.

"I have an erection, too," Yousi announced.

"They were very pretty," Xian remarked.

"Are you talking about his cheeks or the pets?" Omaki quipped.

Now Iason turned to Yousi, wondering if he should ask him to leave. He wasn't sure how the Blondie would react to what he had to say. "Yousi," he whispered, leaning down, "I forgot to ask Toma to bring us some more punch. Do you think you could do me a favor, and go down and ask him for me?"

"Of course," Yousi answered, happy to be of assistance.

The others exchanged puzzled looks, knowing full well that Iason only had to summon Toma via intercom.

As soon as Yousi left, Heiku turned to Iason.

"Why did you send him away?"

"Because I want to talk to you about something of great importance, and I wasn't sure how he would react." Now Iason paused, looking at each of them, one by one.

"What is it, Iason?" Raoul asked, concerned.

"Raoul, do you remember why Yousi was modified?"

Looking a little surprised at this, the Blondie paused before replying. "Of course."

"It was because he claimed Jupiter could be brought down. Isn't that right?"

Now Raoul looked a bit uncomfortable. "We're not to talk about that, Iason. As you well know."

"We're going to talk about it. Because what Yousi said was right. There is a way."

With that, Iason reached into a pocket inside his cape and pulled out Yousi's logs. He tossed the logs at Raoul's feet. "And it's all right there."

"What is that?" Heiku demanded.

"Yousi's logs," Omaki answered.

Raoul remained frozen for a moment, then reached down and picked up the book, thumbing through it. "Where did you get this?"

"From Omaki."

Turning to Omaki, Raoul frowned. "You've had this, all this time?"

"No. It just came to me via messenger capsule. From Yousi."

"From Yousi?" Heiku and Raoul exchanged confused looks.

"Yes. From Yousi. The old Yousi. OUR Yousi. It seems he was afraid Jupiter would discover what he was up to, and so he took certain precautions. I received these logs recently via a messenger capsule that Yousi had arranged to find me, nearly five years ago."

"Why are you bringing this up?" Raoul demanded.

"Yes," Xian agreed, looking rather grave. "I think we ought to get rid of the logs."

"That's what I brought you all together to decide. If we're going to destroy the logs, I want us all to be in agreement."

"Why us, Iason?" Heiku asked.

"Because each of us has a reason to want a life without Jupiter's intrusion."

A long silence followed this remark.

"Are you saying," Heiku whispered, "you want to bring down Jupiter?"

"I'm putting it on the table for discussion," came Iason's cryptic reply.

Now Raoul stood up. "Are you out of your mind? Have you any idea what would happen to us if Jupiter knew we were even discussing this?"

"There are many things that Jupiter would be upset to learn about us," Iason replied, calmly, looking directly at Raoul. "About EACH of us."

“This is insane!”

“He does have a point,” Heiku remarked, quietly. **“If Jupiter ever finds out about Yui, Raoul, you’re in for it. As am I.”** He turned to Xian. **“And what you’re doing with Juthian is just as serious.”**

Xian blushed furiously. **“How do you know about that?”** he whispered.

“Oh come now. Everyone knows. Megala’s already told all of Eos that you took Juthian to your lake villa.”

“That nosy little gossip!” Xian shouted, jumping up.

Raoul shook his head. **“This is still insane. Omaki, don’t tell me you’re on board with this?”**

“I have no great love for Jupiter at the moment,” came the Blondie’s rather clipped reply.

Now Raoul turned to Iason. **“Iason. You seriously don’t mean to go against Jupiter? Listen. It can’t be done. She’ll find out. Jupiter has eyes...everywhere. Surely YOU must know that!”**

“Read the logs, Raoul.”

“I don’t need to read them!” Raoul shot back, angrily, throwing the logs to the ground. **“Jupiter means order. Without Jupiter, it would be...total anarchy. You mean to let all of Tanagura go to ruin over your perverted lust for that mongrel!”**

“I’m hardly advocating the destruction of Tanagura, Raoul,” Iason retorted, just as angry. **“Don’t you think I care about my own city?”**

“It’s not YOUR city, Iason.”

“You know what I mean! I am Head of the Syndicate!”

“We all know who you are!”

“Please, let’s quiet things down a bit,” Omaki cautioned.

“I can’t believe you’d turn against Jupiter! After everything she’d done for you. You’re ungrateful, that’s what I think!” Raoul continued.

“I was counting on your loyalty, Raoul,” Iason whispered, hotly. **“You PROMISED.”**

“You know I would do almost anything for you, Iason. But this is...suicide.”

“Why don’t we read the logs before we make any sort of decision?” Omaki suggested.

“I don’t need to read them,” Raoul repeated. “I’m against this absurd plan.”

“I think we should get rid of them. The logs,” Xian agreed. “Throw them in that fire, over there.”

“I don’t know,” Heiku said, thoughtfully, picking up the logs and thumbing through the book. “Have you read them, Omaki?”

“Not really. It’s all over my head,” Omaki confessed. “If only Yousi had remembered to interpret them for the rest of us.”

“Interpret what?” Yousi asked, standing at the entrance to the room. He had been there for some moments, listening to the argument in confusion.

The Blondies all turned, now falling silent.

Heiku sighed. “Interpret this, Yousi,” he said, holding up the logbook. “It’s something you wrote...years ago.”

Upon seeing the tiny logbook, Yousi stiffened, more memories suddenly flooding back. In an instant, he remembered what had happened to him. He remembered...writing the logs. And Jupiter discovering him. And then....

“Yousi!” Heiku leapt up and rushed over to him when he saw the blood drain from the Blondie’s face. “Are you all right?”

Yousi’s gaze gravitated to the logbook still in Heiku’s hand. He reached down, taking the book from him.

“My logs,” he whispered, weakly.

“You remember?” Astonished, Heiku watched Yousi open the book and flip through it, nodding.

“I don’t remember...exactly what I wrote. But I know,” Yousi fell silent for a moment before looking up at Heiku. “I know what this book contains. And that this is why I am...the way I am now.” He looked at Omaki. “I sent this to you.”

“Yes,” Omaki nodded.

“And now you’re all...talking about what to do about it. Well, I’ll tell you what to do. Take a good look at me. You want to be like me?” Yousi held up the book. “I say burn it.”

“I agree,” Xian announced, passionately. “Let’s get rid of it, right here. Right now.”

“I second that,” Raoul announced.

“This is too important a decision to make so quickly,” Omaki countered. “Why don’t we all sit down and discuss this calmly.”

A sudden high-pitched scream, one that Omaki recognized well, startled them all. “Aki,” he muttered, glancing at Iason. “I’m sorry. I’ll go take care of it.”

Iason nodded almost dismissively, his eyes locked on Raoul. “You’re not even giving this serious consideration.”

“That’s because...I care about you, Iason. I know what Jupiter can do. Yousi’s right. It’s too dangerous. We’re jeopardizing everything just discussing this. What if Jupiter’s listening right now?”

Iason softened a bit at this, shaking his head. “I don’t think Jupiter even knows about the Observatory. It wasn’t in the tower designs.”

Now Toma stood at the doorway, uncertainly, holding a tray of punch. “I’m sorry to interrupt, Master,” he said, softly. “But you wanted more punch?”

Iason turned to him, looking a bit horrified as he realized what Toma had most likely overheard.

“I didn’t hear anything,” Toma said, rather foolishly.

The Blondies all looked at each other.

“Now what do we do?” Heiku whispered.

“I won’t...say anything. I promise,” Toma pleaded, looking terrified.

“Of course you didn’t,” Iason replied, now regaining his composure. “There was nothing for you to hear. Now, leave the punch, and go.”

“Yes, Master,” Toma whispered, his face flushing red. He glanced at Xian before leaving.

“That’s a problem, right there,” Raoul remarked.

Xian nodded. “Toma isn’t good about keeping secrets.”

“I’ll talk to him later tonight,” Iason said.

“What if he says something to the others, now?” Heiku demanded.

Iason shook his head. “I don’t think he will. He looked petrified.”

Omaki, meanwhile, hurried downstairs, feeling a bit angry when he heard Aki continue to scream. He walked into the great hall and saw the boy dashing around the room, screaming and giggling as Suuki chased him and the others in the room tried unsuccessfully to quiet them.

“Aki!” Omaki bellowed.

The boy immediately stopped, looking up in surprise as Omaki walked toward him, then knelt down and shook him. “What do you think you’re doing, screaming like that? This may be your party, but I expect you to behave appropriately, or I’ll turn you over my knee in front of everyone here, you can count on it. Is that understood?”

Aki stared back, breathing hard, his eyes strangely dilated.

Omaki frowned, touching the back of his hand to his forehead. The boy felt warm, though that was probably from running.

“I’m sorry,” Aki whispered. “I can’t...help it. I’m too excited.”

“You’d better help it, if you know what’s good for you. You don’t want to ruin the day by getting spanked, do you?”

Aki shook his head, eyes wide.

Now Omaki turned to Suuki, who was watching Aki’s reprimand, looking a bit frightened.

“You, too, Suuki. I expect you to behave, or I’ll spank you both. Is that understood?”

The boys both nodded a bit timidly.

“Now,” Omaki said, leaning forward to kiss Aki’s forehead. “You know I don’t want to have to do that. You behave, and I won’t have to. Why don’t you go get some more punch, and then try to settle down.”

“They seem to have a lot of nervous energy,” Juthian remarked, stepping forward. “Maybe if I took them to the pool?”

Upon hearing this, Aki and Suuki looked at each other with utter delight. “Can we, Master?” Aki pleaded.

“That’s a good idea, Juthian,” Omaki nodded, deciding not to correct Aki, though he had called him Master. “Yes, you may go. Now, mark my words, I don’t want to hear another scream out of either of you. If I do, you know what will happen.”

“We won’t,” Aki promised. “But...I don’t have swimming trunks.”

“Ah well. Just...swim naked then, I suppose.”

The boys giggled at this.

“Good! I’m hot!” Aki announced. “I want to be naked and wet!”

“You’re hot from running around,” Omaki remarked, patting him on the bottom. “So settle down.”

“Here,” Juthian said, bringing them both some more punch. “This will help cool you down.”

The boys drank greedily and Omaki, satisfied that matters were under control, hurried back up the Observatory.

Meanwhile the new pets, spying Azka, gravitated toward him. He smiled, glad to see familiar faces.

“So, do you have new masters?” he asked.

“All of us, except him,” replied Raoul’s new pet, motioning to A-997M, who bowed his head, looking a little depressed.

“Who are your masters?” Yui demanded, overhearing this.

“I’m the pet of Lord Am,” the dark-haired pet answered, proudly.

“That’s my Master!” Yui exclaimed.

“Then, I suppose you’ll be taking care of me.”

“Hmmm.” Yui looked very displeased, turning away a bit rudely.

“What about you two?” Sarius asked, curious, puzzled that three of them had been purchased.

“Lord Quiahtenon chose me, and he belongs to Lord Sami,” the blonde-haired pet replied.

“Uh oh. Juthian won’t like that,” Riki remarked.

“Won’t like what?” Katze asked, rejoining them after visiting a bit with Daryl.

“Xian took a pet.”

“No shit?”

Riki shrugged. “Apparently.”

“Well, that’s smart. People were starting to talk.”

“But if Heiku took a pet,” Sarius began, frowning. “I guess that means Ima’s getting the boot.”

“I thought he just bought her,” Katze remarked. “Where is she, by the way?”

“He made her stay behind. I don’t know the details, but I know she’s in trouble over something. He was upset with her, anyway. I heard him yelling.”

“Poor Ima,” Yui said. “She won’t be too happy tonight.”

“No,” Sarius agreed. “She won’t.”

“I need a smoke,” Riki announced. “Katze?”

Katze nodded. “Yeah. Me too.”

“Mind if I join you?” Kahlan asked. It was the first thing he’d said in a long while, and Riki looked at him, surprised.

“Sure,” he shrugged, and the three of them walked off toward the balcony.

Unnoticed, Enyu slipped away from the others, heading down the guest wing. He had begun to feel...certain urges, urges which confused him, given the time of the month. It wasn’t anywhere near the new moon, and yet he was starting to feel wildly aroused. Although he was initially planning just to look for a quiet unused room to relieve himself, he found himself following Juthian and the boys down to the pool area instead.

Omaki rejoined the others in the Observatory, glad to see that everyone had calmed down a bit. He sat across from Iason, trying to focus on what the Blondie was saying, but finding instead his thoughts...and his gaze...drifting to Iason’s nether regions.

Was he just imagining it, or was there an unusually large bulge there? And now that he thought about it, he was feeling a bit aroused himself. Perhaps it was threatening to spank Aki that had done it, or the boy’s proclamation that he was “hot” and wanted to be “naked and wet.” Whatever the reason, Omaki found he couldn’t

concentrate on the conversation. He uncrossed his legs, suddenly feeling uncomfortable.

When he heard Aki's distinctive scream again, at first, he couldn't quite believe it.

Iason glanced at him, looking a bit annoyed.

"I'll take care of it," Omaki replied, leaping up. "He isn't usually like this," he added.

"I should hope not," Iason replied. "I won't tolerate that sort of behavior."

"Nor will I," Omaki assured him, unbuckling his belt. "He's in for it now."

The Blondie rushed down the stairs, his belt now firmly in hand, furious. Why hadn't Aki listened to him? Now Omaki would be forced to discipline him on this day, of all days. He strode through the great hall, then began jogging down the corridor when he heard Aki's screaming increase.

Aki was about to get a good, hard spanking--that much the Blondie knew. Omaki clutched the belt, prepared to give the boy a lesson he would never forget, when a scene appeared before him he could not quite believe.

Enyu was chasing Aki around the pool, both of them completely naked, the Xeronian fully erect.

"Enyu!" he bellowed.

His pet looked toward him, then seemed to ignore him, continuing to pursue Aki, who was now screaming hysterically.

"He's trying to ravage me!"

Omaki rushed toward Enyu, grabbing him and holding him against his body, still clutching his belt in one hand. "What is wrong with you? Stop it!"

Enyu struggled desperately, then, suddenly feeling Omaki's erection against his buttocks, relaxed. "Fuck me," he pleaded, in Xeronian. "Please, Master."

"Are you...in your interval?" Omaki asked, confused. "This isn't your time, is it?"

“Oh, Master,” Enyu whispered. “I’ll do anything you like. Let me suck you.”

“Juthian, where can I chain him up?” Omaki asked.

“Master Iason has a T-stand in his room,” Juthian suggested. “Or there’s Riki’s post, in the great hall.”

Enyu rubbed his body back against his master, seductively. “I can feel you, Master. You’re ready for me.”

“Hush,” Omaki whispered, though his horny little pet was quite right. He WAS ready for Enyu, and now he just wanted to find somewhere private to unleash his pent-up lust. He picked Enyu up, carrying him off toward Iason’s bedroom, his heart beating fast.

Riki, Kahlan and Katze were on the balcony, smoking, when they saw Omaki rush past them, carrying the naked pet.

“Did you see that?” Riki demanded. “That was catboy!”

Katze frowned, puzzled. “What is going on?”

“Let’s find out.” Riki tossed his smoke over the ledge and then hurried inside, watching with utter delight as Omaki put Enyu in the T-stand.

“That’s odd,” Katze remarked. “He’s rutting.”

Omaki turned and, seeing his audience, pushed the door control. The door hummed shut.

“Speaking of rutting, I’m horny as hell,” Riki announced, eyeing Kahlan.

“Me too,” Kahlan confessed, confused.

Katze frowned, hearing something that, at first, he thought he was imagining.

“Where’s that moaning coming from?” Riki asked, looking around.

Katze turned on his heels and strode toward Daryl’s room, entering and then standing in the doorway, hands on his hips.

“What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” he demanded.

Daryl was on the bed, pants pulled down to his ankles, wearing the forbidden strap-on G-wave device, thrusting into the air.

“Please,” Daryl pleaded, “just let me come.”

“I don’t think so. Take that off, this instant.”

“Please!”

“NOW, Daryl! I told you, you can’t use that anymore! Heiku says that’s very dangerous!”

“I don’t care!”

“That’s it.” Katze stepped forward and removed the device, throwing it across the room. It hit the wall, the control panel shattering.

“You broke it! Dammit, Katze!”

Furious, Katze turned and went to the closet, retrieving the paddle he had bought for Odi.

“You are going to learn to listen to me,” he announced, shaking the paddle in the air.

“Where did you get that?”

“Turn over.”

“Fuck you!”

Katze lunged forward, grabbing Daryl and struggling with him for a few moments before managing to get him over his knee.

“This is fucking serious, Daryl,” he spat. “You could have died. You’re going to listen to me when I tell you not do something.” With that, he began to paddle his lover, hard.

Daryl was so surprised that at first, he was completely silent, stunned by the pain of his punishment. Then he began to yelp and struggle, deciding that being spanked was not nearly as fun as he had always imagined it would be.

“Stop!” he pleaded. “I won’t...I won’t do it again!”

“No, you won’t.”

“Ow! OW!”

“Hurts, doesn’t it?”

“I couldn’t help it!”

“Hush! You’ll take your punishment.”

“Please, Katze!”

“Are you going to mind me?”

“Yes!”

“Hmmm. Let’s be sure.” With that, Katze gave him a few especially hard whacks, and then stopped, satisfied that he had gotten his point across.

“Everyone’s watching us,” Daryl whispered, mortified.

Katze looked up and realized he had failed to shut the door.

In Iason’s bedroom, Omaki had Enyu fully restrained in the T-stand.

“I made it clear to you that you are to keep away from Aki,” he scolded, gifting his pet with a few punishing strikes with his belt on his backside.

Enyu yelped, nevertheless retaining his erection even as the Blondie punished him. Omaki, now aroused beyond bearing, tossed the belt aside and removed his gloves, running his fingers teasingly up and down the Xeronian’s body.

“Ooo, Master,” Enyu whispered. “Please touch me.”

“I am touching you,” came the Blondie’s saucy reply.

“Touch my cock.”

“If I touch you, you’ll release, and I don’t want you to come yet.”

“You’re torturing me!”

Omaki moved close behind him, pulling Enyu’s hair aside to bite his throat. “I like to torture you,” he whispered, unfastening his trousers.

“Then fuck me,” Enyu pleaded.

“Oh, I’ll fuck you,” Omaki promised, inserting a finger into the Xeronian’s portal. “But I’m warning you, I’m especially engorged just now. It’s going to hurt.”

“Fuck me HARD.”

“Enyu,” Omaki breathed, nuzzling against neck and reaching around to tweak his nipple with one hand, while continuing to finger him with the other. “We really shouldn’t be doing this here.”

“I don’t care!”

“Neither do I, oddly enough,” Omaki confessed, suddenly pulling his pet’s head back by the hair with a violence that was a bit

unusual, even for the discipline-loving Blondie. “And I’m going to fuck you senseless.”

Enyu gasped, thrilled.

Omaki released his cock from his trousers, sliding it up between Enyu’s buttocks. “Are you ready?”

“Yes!”

The Blondie removed his finger and put his hands firmly on Enyu’s hips, sinking into him with a shudder and deep groan.

“Mercy,” Omaki whispered, his eyes rolling back.

Enyu cried out, wincing and instinctively thrusting his hips forward in an attempt to escape the Blondie’s painful girth.

“I thought you wanted to be fucked,” Omaki whispered, forcing the Xeronian’s hips back and wiggling in as deep as he could.

“I do,” Enyu gasped.

“Then quit fighting me.”

Enyu struggled to relax, desperately wanting to be fucked and yet a bit overcome, as usual, with the initial pain of penetration.

Omaki reached around, his fingers encircling Enyu’s shaft.

“Oh yes,” his pet whispered. “Yes, Master. Omaki! Please keep doing that.”

“Do you mean this?” Omaki teased, with a hard thrust. “Or this?” Now he began pumping his pet.

“Oh!”

Omaki sunk his teeth into Enyu’s neck again, eliciting another gasp from the Xeronian. “You’re so bloody tight and perfect, pet,” the Blondie groaned, now thrusting hard and fast.

“I’m going to come!”

“Yes,” Omaki hissed. “Come for me, pet.”

Enyu complied, his semen pumping out and running down the Blondie’s hand, his sex cry spine-chillingly erotic.

“Mmmm. Yessss. Just like that, Enyu.” Now Omaki increased the cadence of his thrusts, letting his head fall back as he spread his legs apart a bit more, feeling his own ascent beginning. “Oh fuck,” he whispered, with barbaric vulgarity, so overcome with the pleasure that he was then rendered silent, his body shuddering and

tensing as his hot sex shot into his pet's tight sanctum. It seemed to him that it was the best orgasm he had ever had in his life.

* * *

"Omaki sure is taking a long time," Heiku remarked.

"Maybe we should get back to the party," Xian suggested, shifting a bit uncomfortably in his chair.

"Is it just me, or does someone think there's something in the punch?" Raoul said, finally.

Everyone looked at Iason, who frowned, staring at his own empty glass, suddenly realizing what seemed so familiar about the taste. "Oh, dear."

"What?" Raoul shook his head.

"Tarnacsian cider," he whispered, his eyes flashing. "I'll have Tai's skin for this."

"Tar--what did you call it?"

"It's...if I'm right, there's been...a terrible mistake. This is a potent aphrodisiac."

"Well, that explains it," Heiku nodded. "I had about four cups of it."

"As did I," Raoul agreed.

"Everyone was drinking it." Xian stood up, suddenly worried about Juthian.

"We'd better go back downstairs," Iason agreed, rising, realizing the potential for disaster.

Raoul and Xian followed him, but when Yousi got up to leave, Heiku reached out and stayed him, putting his hand on his shoulder.

"Where are you going, Yousi?" he whispered.

Yousi turned around, eyes wide.

Downstairs, it looked as though the penthouse had been turned upside down. Sarius and Kahlan were fighting, while Ru and Juthian were trying to break them up, Aki and Suuki were running through the great hall, naked and dripping wet, Ayuda was kissing

Toma, and Tai was standing in the foyer, watching the unfolding drama with a look of utter confusion on his face.

“Where’s Yui?” Raoul demanded, though he was ignored by everyone.

Iason strode over to Tai, grabbing him by the front of this shirt and lifting him off the ground. “What did you put in the punch?”

“N-nothing! It’s just...regular punch!”

“It’s Tarnacsian cider! I can taste it!”

“But...it can’t be! I....” Now Tai suddenly fell silent, the blood draining from his face. “The ice! It’s the ice!” As the full horror of the situation hit Tai, Iason sighed, setting him back on the ground.

“What can we do to stop it?”

“There isn’t anything...we just have to let it run its course,” Tai whispered, shaking his head.

Now Iason shook a finger in his face. “I’m not finished with you,” he warned, turning sharply on his heels.

The full effect of the cider suddenly seemed to hit Xian, and he seized Juthian, dragging him over to the table.

“Master! What are you doing!” Juthian cried, as the Blondie threw him facedown over the edge, and began unfastening his pants.

“That much should be obvious,” Xian replied, his voice shaking with lust.

Iason passed by them without even trying to stop the Blondie, making for his bedroom, but when he opened the door and beheld Omaki and Enyu, now together in bed, he turned back, not even bothering to close the door.

Now he hurried down the corridor toward Riki’s room, hoping to find his pet there, Raoul close on his heels.

“If he’s with Yui, I’ll kill him,” Raoul announced.

“You’ll not touch him, Raoul,” Iason shot back, though he increased his pace, a bit worried about this possible scenario.

When he reached Riki’s room he found the door open. Both Blondies rushed in, but after a quick search discovered Riki, alone, naked on his bed but for his golden collar.

“Where’s Yui?” Raoul barked.

“Fuck if I know! Get the hell out!” Riki cried, pumping himself. He turned to Iason. “Iason. Please! The ring...please, I need to come.”

Raoul frowned and left, while Iason made his way over to the bed, stripping off his clothes on the way.

“Oh yeah,” Riki moaned, his eyes dilating as he watched Iason undress. “I need a good fucking.”

“You shall have it,” Iason replied, through clenched teeth.

In truth, Iason was now so aroused he could hardly think straight. He managed to remove his boots and his pants and, finally naked, straddled his pet, rocking against Riki’s swollen cock.

“Kiss me,” Riki pleaded.

Iason needed no further encouragement. He repositioned himself, lying on top of his pet and kissing him so hard and deep that he bruised the mongrel’s mouth. Neither of them felt they could get enough of the other. They rolled around on the bed, groping each other frantically.

“Iason. Please...suck on me.”

The Blondie smiled, dragging his tongue all the way down Riki’s body until he reached his pet’s twitching erection, which he began exploring eagerly with his mouth.

“Yeah,” Riki cried, thrusting into his mouth, excited. “Aw...you’re fucking amazing. Shit....I’m gonna come fast!”

Almost as soon as he said the words, Riki came, giving his Blondie master a mouthful of his hot sex. Iason looked up with lust-filled eyes, a trickle of semen dripping from his lips. He moved up, pushing Riki’s legs back toward his shoulders and getting up on his knees as he grabbed his pet’s wrists, pinning them to the bed.

“I’m taking you hard,” he warned, and then, almost as if his body moved beyond his control, he was inside his pet, sliding in effortlessly.

“Oh, pet.”

Riki grinned. “I got ready for you,” he explained, glancing toward the long sex toy now sitting on the bedside table.

“Good boy,” Iason whispered, pushing his wrists firmly to the bed as he began fucking the mongrel with all his Blondie might. He pushed Riki’s legs back further to accomplish even deeper penetration, the sweat from his efforts now dripping down onto his pet’s face.

“You’re doing it!” Riki exclaimed. “You’re making that...little sneer. That’s sexy as hell!”

Excited, Iason began moaning and grunting, until finally he let out a long, low sex-cry that sent shivers down Riki’s back.

And the Commander’s.

Voshka leaned in the doorway, grinning. “You sure know how to throw a good party, Iason. Looks like I’m just in time for dinner.”

“Fuck,” Riki whispered, biting his lip. “I’m getting another erection.”

The Fetters of the Heart

Iason withdrew, breathing a bit deeply from his exertions as he released his grip on Riki's wrists. Though he had just orgasmed, he was not completely spent, his cock already betraying his interest in Riki's provocative gaze.

"Look at you. You're ready for round two," the mongrel commented, stroking his own developing erection eagerly as he regarded the Blondie's obvious arousal.

"So it seems."

"Please tell me you're going to invite me in," Voshka purred, eyeing the naked couple with unfettered delight from the doorway, where he continued to lean against the doorframe.

At this, Iason got up, and began walking seductively toward the Commander.

"That's it," Voshka encouraged, his groin now tight and inflamed as he appraised the handsome Blondie moving erotically toward him.

Iason stopped in front of him and then, with a small smile, reached up and activated the door-lock button on the control panel.

The door hummed shut, leaving the Commander outside.

Riki began laughing hysterically at this, holding his sides and giggling like a schoolboy.

Voshka regarded the shut door with amusement, not at all put out by Iason's rejection. Although he would have certainly enjoyed a REAL threesome with the beautiful Blondie and his pet, he was, in truth, looking forward to a night with his own new acquisition.

“Tonight, then?” he called out teasingly before turning and retrieving the bag he’d brought with him--something special, just for his new pet.

“That was fucking brilliant,” Riki gasped, trying to catch his breath.

“You thought so, did you?” Now Iason climbed onto the bed and began slinking toward his pet like a great wildcat, eyes bright with lust.

Riki managed to stop laughing and got up on his knees, stroking his new erection meaningfully.

“So...what the fuck is going on anyway? Did Tai spike the punch with that cider or what?”

“Apparently. Turn over on your stomach,” Iason commanded.

“How about you get on your stomach?” Riki countered.

“Obey me, pet.” Iason suddenly felt overwhelmed with desire for the mongrel, the cider now making his blood run hot. He was in no mood for argument; he was ready for another good fucking and wasn’t about to be put off from this task.

“Come on,” Riki pleaded. “My ass is still sore. How about I get a turn? Let me give you a wicked-nice tongue-fucking. You know you want it. I know just how you like it. Remember?”

At this, Iason hesitated, admittedly tempted by the proposal. Sensing the Blondie’s interest, Riki illustrated his offer by flicking his tongue across his own lips, gifting his Master with a drop-dead sexy gaze, eyes smoldering dark with lust.

“I want to taste you. Let me make you moan. Just like this--my hot wet tongue slithering deep inside your--”

“Very well,” Iason interrupted, his heart accelerating at his pet’s mongrel-style provocation.

“Yes!” Triumphant, Riki leapt off the bed, then pointed to it, moving around to the foot of the bed. “Get on your knees, legs apart, and put your head down on the bed.”

The Blondie obeyed, offering his pet such an enticing view that Riki almost whimpered. It was not only the intimacy of the pose but also the hints of Iason’s earlier discipline that made him especially

pleasing to the mongrel; all along the Blondie's legs and buttocks, visible marks of his punishment still lingered on his otherwise flawless skin.

"Fuck. You have no idea how bloody sexy you look," Riki whispered. "Arch your back a bit more."

Iason did so, and Riki groaned, pumping himself.

"Get on with it," Iason snapped, impatient now for stimulation and release. He'd never felt so aroused in his entire life; it was almost unbearable, and Riki's groans weren't helping. It was hard to believe he'd ejaculated but moments before--he felt as though he hadn't come in weeks.

"Blondies sure are grumpy when they're horny," Riki muttered, but obliged Iason by moving behind him on the bed on his own knees. Taking hold of his cheeks, he spread him apart even more, touching his tongue tentatively to Iason's pink portal.

The Blondie rewarded him with a low moan, wiggling back against his tongue. Riki pulled back, grinning.

"You liked that, did you?"

"Don't stop," Iason commanded, sharply. "Don't tease me, Riki."

"No?" Riki tested this mandate by flicking his tongue lightly against the puckered flesh, then pulling back again.

"Riki!"

"All right, all right. Just trying to have a little fun. Jeez! You're sure uptight."

Iason was about to offer a scathing reply when he was silenced by his pet's undeniably skilled lingual arts. He gripped the sheets with both his hands, gritting his teeth, gasping and almost choking on his own moans as the mongrel proceeded to stimulate him in precisely the ways he liked best, exploring his entire perineum and then thrusting his tongue inside his sanctum.

"Good boy," he whispered. "That's very good, Riki...ohhhh."

Riki answered this by reaching around to stroke Iason's matured erection, which twitched impatiently against his hand.

Unable to resist, the mongrel withdrew, then whispered, "I'll keep going, but you have to call me LORD Riki first."

"Riki!"

"Say it!"

Exasperated, Iason answered this by turning around and flipping Riki onto the bed. "I'm in no mood for games," he warned. He rose and stood at the foot of the bed, arms across his chest as though trying to decide what to do first.

Riki laughed at his expression. "Oh. Yes, Master," he replied, mockingly. "I beg your pardon, Master. Would you like me to suck your cock now, Master?"

The Blondie regarded him for a moment, softening at his pet's playful, impish grin. "What I want," he replied, his voice low and quivering with desire, "is for you to obey me, pet, and do exactly as I say."

The mongrel quieted, studying Iason. The Blondie was--he realized, finally--in full Master mode, which meant he would have his way in everything. He continued to stand at the foot of the bed, now coaxing his erection to maturity. His elongated cock, swollen to an almost frightening girth, was so engorged that the tip curved slightly inward.

It had been a long time since he had witnessed Iason so aroused or so intense, his raging lust spilling over into his eyes, into his features, even into his voice. Riki was almost afraid; but then, it was difficult to be anything but stimulated at the moment, and it had been a long while since he had truly feared his Blondie Master.

Perhaps because he knew, in his heart, that Iason loved him. Whatever he had in mind, Riki knew he would find pleasure in it, at least at some point. That had been a brutal truth from his very first days in Eos. Even when Iason forced him to bend to his will, his submission was always entangled with acquiescence, sweetened by the Blondie's undeniable skills in the art of sensual pleasure.

He lay back, a curious half-smile twisting his lips, wondering what Iason had in mind. "All right. You win. What do you want?"

Now Iason returned the smile, moving over to the side of the bed and retrieving the initialed cuffs and chains Riki had removed and left on the floor. He held them up. "Put these back on."

Riki shrugged, sitting up to obey.

"Hold out your wrists."

Riki did so, and Iason cuffed him, then sat down next to him on the bed, his fingers toying with the chain that hung between the gold-plated cuffs.

"I love that you wore these, Riki," he said, finally. "Earlier, this afternoon. Why did you put them on?"

"I figured you'd like that."

"Then, you did it...to please me?" Iason's gaze was so intense that Riki looked away.

"Yeah, I guess. Well...and, I liked the note."

For a moment the Blondie looked puzzled. "The note?"

"The note you left--never mind. Forget it." Embarrassed, Riki found his cheeks flushing hot as he squirmed under Iason's scrutiny.

Laughing softly as he realized what his pet referred to, Iason reached out and tipped the mongrel's chin up with his fingers, encouraging his attention. "You mean to tell me, all I had to do was leave a note? For that demonstration of your submission to me?"

Riki scowled. "Not exactly. I said forget it!"

"Don't tell me I've finally tamed you, my naughty little pet?"

At this, Riki jerked away from Iason's touch, suddenly angry. "I'm not an animal to be tamed! Why are you always--"

His tirade was cut short by Iason's insistent kiss, a kiss so passionate and demanding that it left him breathless when at last the Blondie pulled away.

"Lie back on the bed," Iason whispered.

"Taming...taming is for animals. I'm not an animal." The protest came out as almost a whimper as Riki slowly eased back on the bed. His heart was beating so hard in his chest that he felt he could hardly breathe. He was aroused, excited, angry, and a bit afraid--for some inexplicable reason--all at once.

“Taming is for pets,” Iason corrected. “And you are my pet, Riki.” He moved up beside him on the bed, one hand caressing the mongrel’s tanned, inner thigh.

Riki closed his eyes, giving into the pleasure of his Master’s knowing touch.

* * *

Raoul searched the penthouse with growing concern, anxious to resolve the whereabouts of Yui. He found himself cursing under his breath; he wasn’t even completely sure who he was cursing, though one thing was certain: whoever he found with Yui would not live long to tell about it. He would tear that miserable creature limb from limb.

“Yui!” he called out again, angrily, banging on random doors in his desperation to locate his newly restored would-be pet. A faint, muffled moan answered him and Raoul froze, turning his head one way and the next to determine the direction from which the sound emanated.

“Answer me!” he bellowed. “Answer me this moment, Yui!”

Once again he discerned a faint moan; and this time he felt sure he recognized the voice as belonging to Yui. He turned, strode a few feet down the hall and stood poised outside one of the rooms, listening. A third moan confirmed his suspicions.

“Open!” he commanded, and the door immediately hummed open, for all the doors within the penthouse were still programmed to accept Raoul’s voice commands. He rushed into the room and found--much to his initial relief--that Yui was in the room alone. Less pleasing to the great Blondie was the discovery that Yui was sitting on the edge of the bed, pants unzipped, fondling himself.

He came to a dead stop, hands on his hips. “What do you think you’re doing?” he demanded. “Why didn’t you answer me when I called you?”

“What do you care?” Yui gasped, with uncharacteristic defiance, his eyes gleaming angrily. “Why don’t you go play with your new pet?”

For a moment Raoul stared back at him in utter disbelief. It was completely unlike Yui to challenge him in any way, and to be openly rebellious was almost...unthinkable. But while the Blondie felt an immediate sting of anger in response to his defiance, at the same time, he could not help but be a little pleased over Yui’s obvious jealousy over his new purchase. More than this, however, the cider was now effecting a rather demanding tightening of his loins which, in concert with Yui’s rather unabashed performance, worked to make the Blondie’s head spin with thoughts of ravishing him then and there.

But Yui’s challenge could not go unanswered, and Raoul had always been a Blondie who insisted on obedience when it came to members of his household. He knew that the first order of business was to settle on a punishment befitting of Yui’s transgression. Unlike Iason, Raoul was a firm believer that punishment ought to be administered on the spot, as soon as disobedience was discovered, no matter what the circumstances. He should have given Yui a taming when he had openly defied him earlier in the evening--in the company of Blondies, no less--but he would not make that error again.

He moved toward a vase of long, stiff yewshi reeds apparently meant as a decoration for the room, and then selected one of the reeds, whacking it against his hand to test its suitability for discipline.

“First, you challenged me openly in the presence of other Blondies,” he replied, his voice barely concealing his anger, “and then you failed to answer my summons.”

Yui watched Raoul with a growing sense of dread. He knew that look on his Master’s face--he had seen it often enough, when one of his many pets had been foolish enough to cull his disfavor. It was an uncompromising look that meant punishment was forthcoming.

“Then,” the Blondie continued, “I find you in here, fondling yourself, and you defy me once again, addressing me in a manner most unfitting of your station and, more important, displeasing to me.”

Now Raoul slowly walked toward Yui, whose eyes had opened wide upon apprehending what his Master had in mind. In that instant Yui suddenly seemed to remember that Raoul was a Blondie--a great, immensely strong, rather intimidating Blondie--who certainly had no obligation to even give Yui the time of day. He gazed at the long reed that Raoul now tapped against his leg, realizing--too late--his peril.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” Raoul demanded, as he stopped in front of him.

Yui, who had always been the perfect model of obedience, was quick to assume a look of contrition, his cheeks flushing pink. “I am...s-s-sorry, Master,” he whispered.

Raoul managed to suppress a smile at Yui’s immediate submission; it was one of the things he had always liked about the quiet, agreeable boy. His rebellion, surprising in and of itself, was predictably short-lived, and now Yui’s fearful expression and trembling was exactly what Raoul had hoped for.

Even so, it wasn’t enough.

“Lower your pants, Yui, and stand up against the wall, facing it. I’ve never had to discipline you before, but you’re going to find out now what happens when you displease me.”

“Yes, Master,” Yui muttered, miserably making his way over to the wall and then letting his bottoms fall to his thighs. He kept his head bowed, shamed that his Master was about to punish him. It was the first time Yui had received punishment--other than a game--at Raoul’s hand, and he felt mortified to have earned it.

“Put your hands over your head, against the wall.”

“I won’t do it again, Master,” Yui tried, weakly, as he obeyed.

“No, you won’t.”

“Please,” he whispered, his voice wavering when Raoul placed his own hand over his, pinning his hands to the wall. “You don’t have to...punish me. I’ll be good, from now on. I promise!”

“What sort of Master would I be, if I didn’t punish you, Yui?” Raoul pressed the cool reed against the boy’s bare bottom, eliciting frightened tears from the trembling youth. “I’ve always made it clear to you that I expect...perfect obedience. Isn’t that true?”

“Yes, Master!”

“I won’t tolerate anything less. Have you forgotten I am your Master?”

“No, Master,” Yui whimpered, terrified by the way Raoul spoke to him, the way he taunted him with the cane, pressing it against his bared flesh.

Raoul had never seen Yui in such a state. He found, in concert with the potent aphrodisiac coursing through his blood, that the boy’s pleas were disconcertingly arousing. He was enjoying every moment of it.

“Your mouth remembers. I’ll have your body remember now.”

With that, Raoul whipped back his arm and--keeping him pinned firmly to the wall--gave Yui a caning he would never forget. Although it was far less than the Blondie was capable of administering, to Yui, who had never really been punished before, the experience was beyond anything he could have imagined.

His cries betrayed his anguish as strike after strike met with his exposed flesh; his thighs and buttocks were covered with angry cane marks, reddening and welting quickly under the Blondie’s firm arm.

Amidst Yui’s tears and pleas for a cessation to the punishment, Raoul finally delivered his last punishing strike, but continued to keep Yui pinned to the wall.

He tossed the cane to the side and stood behind Yui, waiting for him to calm and his tears to subside. His erection was so stiff that he could barely restrain himself from taking the boy on the spot. The sight of Yui’s bared ass, so newly punished, proved irresistible; he removed a glove with his teeth and then began caressing the reddened flesh, then squeezing his plump cheeks.

Yui, though cringing at Raoul's touch on his sensitive skin, quieted as his Master began groping him.

"I purchased the pet on Iason's advice," Raoul whispered, his voice now gentle. "For appearances. You know how people talk. You haven't anything to be jealous about."

"I wasn't...jealous," Yui protested, sniffing.

Raoul smiled. "I think you were. But...I liked that." He moved his hand around to Yui's hip, his fingers inching closer to his newly restored "prize." He was anxious to touch Yui but, at the same time, hesitant to rush into it. "I wasn't angry because of that. It was the way you spoke to me. You know I won't tolerate that."

Yui shivered from the Blondie's touch. "I know," he nodded. "I don't know...what got into me. Please forgive me, Master. It won't happen again."

"It had better not," Raoul warned, though in a softer voice, almost teasing him. "You're my secret pet, Yui. My real pet. But I thought we might both enjoy...watching him perform. Wouldn't you like that?"

The Blondie had moved close behind him, and was whispering in his ear. This, and the powerful impact of the Tarnacsian cider now reaching full manifestation, began to work its magic on Yui's newly revived member, which began to twitch and grow.

"Perhaps," Yui conceded, although privately he had no desire whatsoever to admit another pet into his private, intimate relationship with Raoul Am. He frowned. "You're...are you going to take him, too?"

Smiling, Raoul began to kiss Yui's neck, enjoying the boy's obvious jealousy. "Would that please you?"

"No! I mean," Yui gasped, closing his eyes as the Blondie continued to kiss the side of his throat, back up to his ear. "That is, I would...rather you didn't."

"No? Why not, Yui?"

"Because...I want it to be...just you and me."

"Hmmm." Raoul was secretly delighted, though he planned to torment Yui relentlessly on this point. He had no plans whatsoever

to pair with the new pet--in fact, that would defeat the whole purpose of acquiring him for the sake of appearances. But he was enjoying teasing Yui, mostly because the boy's thoughts were so transparent.

Now, however, he was far too excited to continue down this path; he was desperate to explore his newly restored Yui, so desperate, in fact, that he was starting to tremble. With tentative fingers, he slid his hand over the boy's hip bone into the hollow there, and then--ever so gently--began to stroke his newfound erection.

"Oh, Yui," he breathed, closing his eyes. The boy was fully sprung, his organ warm and twitching in his hand. "Why didn't you wait for me? Why did you come into this room alone?"

"I...couldn't help it," Yui panted, eyes rolling back at his Master's experienced caress. "Riki says...he thinks there's something in the punch."

"Yes," Raoul agreed. "Iason thought so, too. It was an accident, I believe."

"You were upstairs with the other Blondies. I...didn't know what else to do. I only knew I had to...do something. And I was afraid to stay in the hall, once things...spun out of control."

"What happened?"

Yui shook his head. "Everything happened all at once. Sarius...suddenly grabbed Ru and pushed him up against the wall, kissing him. Then Kahlan and he...started fighting. And Riki unzipped his pants and started fondling himself--that was right after Katze spanked Daryl. Aki and Suuki were running around naked, I'm not sure why, and that new guard--Ayuda--just walked up to Toma and dragged him off to a corner and started kissing him. Master Omaki was...taking his pet in Iason's bedroom, and he didn't even close the door. And your...your new pet...kept telling me he wanted more punch and this and that, and driving me crazy. And then...and so, I was confused about what was happening, so I thought it would be better if I found somewhere to be...alone. I mean...away...from everything."

“That was the right thing to do,” Raoul praised, relieved that Yui had maintained enough of his sense to extricate himself from the unfolding mayhem.

Basking in his Master’s approval, Yui leaned back against him, smiling.

“But...you should have answered me when I called for you.”

“I know. I’m sorry. I guess I was jealous...and a little angry about the new pet.”

Yui hated the new pet already. He was haughty, puffed up with pride, and seemed to think Yui existed only to attend to his needs. While he knew that, as Raoul’s official Furniture, this was theoretically true, he hated the boy’s attitude. Although this wasn’t the first time one of his Master’s pets had treated him with such obvious disdain, Yui found the new boy’s manner particularly annoying.

“What’s his name?”

“Mmmm? I don’t know.” Raoul paused for a moment. “I haven’t really thought about it.”

How about Prick-head, Yui thought, though he managed to keep his comment to himself.

“I suppose...Regiland...would be a good name.”

Yui pouted at this, feeling it was far too grand a name for the pet. Regiland was the name of the legendary prince of Sorbus, a semi-mythical kingdom believed to thrive after the fall of King Chunamenkahn, who ruled during the Vendel period on old Amoi. Although Yui himself was also named after another legendary prince, the very idea that the new pet should garner such a lofty appellation made his stomach clench with jealousy.

“I don’t like that name. How about...Puki,” Yui suggested, remembering that Puki was the name of a particularly noxious plant that grew in the wastelands.

Raoul ignored this, having no interest whatsoever in what the new pet was named. He began fondling Yui with more insistence. “You’re so ready, Yui...let’s go lie down on the bed. Take off your pants. And from now on, I want you to wear your usual robe.”

The boy acquiesced, kicking off the unwanted garment. It was one of the first times he had ever attempted to dress in anything other than the traditional long servant robe that Raoul had always insisted he wear. Although, at first, the Blondie had agreed to let him wear the more contemporary, form-fitting outfit to the party--mostly because it revealed Yui's admirable physique in a decidedly flattering, almost pet-isque way--he preferred the boy in the more conservative garment, if only because it offered immediate access to the goodies within, and hid them from others.

Yui moved to the bed and lay down, still wearing his shirt.

"Take everything off."

Obedying, Yui unfastened the buckles that lined the front of his tunic, but before he could finish, Raoul was on the bed, kissing him and twisting his nipples, tearing the shirt from his body.

Yui gasped, and Raoul took advantage of his open mouth by assaulting it with his tongue, kissing him deeply, passionately, so hard that he almost bruised him, all the while stroking the boy's rigid cock.

"Yui," he whispered, finally breaking away. "I wanted to...pleasure you first, but I can't wait."

"That's okay. Do you want me to--"

Raoul answered this by flipping Yui onto his stomach, preparing him briefly with a wildly thrusting finger as he smoothed his own pre-ejaculatory seed over the tip of his head.

He almost felt dizzy with desire, his lust was so intense. The sight of Yui's ass, still ripe from punishment, was so stimulating that he felt he might release on the spot. He withdrew his finger, offering his enormous cock as a more insistent substitute, sliding in with a low, breathless groan.

Yui was tight. It had been some time since they had been together, and Raoul was beside himself with need. He abandoned all attempt at restraint and proceeded to thrust at will, so excited that he began grunting, rather loudly.

The boy smiled at this, enjoying his Master's obvious pleasure. He also discovered that intercourse was different now that he was

“fully equipped”--he found himself moaning and arching his back to relieve the pressure on his ready erection.

Perceiving his need, Raoul abruptly moved onto his side, pulling Yui back against him. He continued to thrust, reaching around to work him as he did so.

Yui responded to this by crying out with such intensity that Raoul nearly began his ascent.

“Yui...that’s so sexy,” he panted.

“Master! I’m going to...do something!”

“Let it go,” he encouraged. “Don’t hold back.”

“It feels so good! Ughn! Aaaah!”

Raoul moaned his response, closing his eyes as he felt his essence rising within. “Oh Yui...you’re so perfect.”

At that moment, as though by divine serendipity, both of them climaxed at precisely the same moment, their voices intertwined in an intimate song of lust and gratification.

They continued to remain thus, lying close together, each savoring the experience.

“Was it what you expected?” Raoul asked, finally.

Yui shook his head. “I can’t even describe it...it was incredible.” For the first time, Yui realized exactly what he had given up by becoming Raoul’s Furniture and undergoing modification.

“You peaked quickly,” Raoul remarked.

“I know...and I feel...all tingly again.”

“Good. I want to explore you a bit more slowly.”

They lay quietly for a few moments. Yui reached back to stroke the Blondie’s hips, his fingers brushing over the branding scar where Iason had left his mark.

“Master?”

“Yes?”

“Do you still love Iason?”

Raoul did not reply, considering the question. It was an issue he had shoved to the back of his mind, too painful to address. Ever since the night at the Taming Tower when Iason had burned his initials into his flesh, he knew that their relationship had changed

irrevocably. The punishment and branding had put a definitive end to his pursuit of Iason, but it would be a lie to say that he no longer had feelings for his old lover.

“Yes,” he admitted, finally.

Disappointed, though not surprised, Yui was silent for a moment. Then, “you would go to him, wouldn’t you? If he asked you?”

“That’s never going to happen.”

“But would you?”

Now the Blondie pulled Yui closer, wondering why he asked. “I don’t know. I hadn’t thought about it.”

It was partly true, and partly a lie. It was true he hadn’t thought about it--he’d forced himself not to think about it--but it was a lie that he didn’t know what he would do. Raoul knew he would go to Iason’s bed in a heartbeat.

“I think you would,” Yui said, thoughtfully.

“We’re finished talking about this,” Raoul announced. “I’m with you, now. And I’ll tell you something. That was one of the best sexual experiences I’ve ever had, just now.”

“But the best was with Iason?”

“Yui,” Raoul scolded. “I told you, we’re finished with that discussion.”

Pouting, Yui was forced to drop the issue, but his heart ached. It wasn’t as though he was surprised at his Master’s answer or his evasiveness. It was just that he desperately wanted Raoul to love him--and only him--completely.

“Master,” he whispered, finally.

“Hmmm.”

“I love you.”

Raoul smiled, closing his eyes and holding him close. “And I love you, my little Furniture-pet,” he replied, whispering into his ear.

Yui, thrilled with this answer, relaxed, forcing himself to put aside his darker thoughts and enjoy the moment.

His Master loved him. That was enough.

* * *

Voshka slipped into his room, delighted to find Azka there, obviously waiting for him. The boy's erection had distorted the shape of his wrap, and the new pet--confused over his sudden, inexplicable lust--was perched on the edge of the bed, sitting on his hands to keep from touching himself.

"Master!" Relieved that his new Master had finally come, Azka beamed at him as he entered.

The Commander smiled. "Why are you sitting on your hands?" he asked, though he knew perfectly well why.

"Oh! I have...a problem." Azka released his hands from the weight of his body, shaking them to encourage the blood flow. He glanced down at his erection, blushing.

"Hmmm. I see that. And...do you mean to tell me you've been sitting here all this time, not even touching yourself?"

"I wasn't sure if you would allow it, so I decided to wait for you."

"Good boy." Voshka approached him, holding up the bag he'd brought back from the convention center. "I have a present for you."

"A present?" Thrilled, Azka waited, eyeing the bag curiously.

"Or rather, a present for me. And you. A present for us both."

"What is it?"

Voshka reached inside the bag and pulled out a bizarre looking device with various straps and arms and a decidedly phallic-looking appendage.

Staring blankly at it for a moment, Azka smiled. "I love it. Is it art?"

At this, Voshka threw back his head and laughed. "Yes. It most certainly is. Functional art. I take it you've never seen one of these before?"

"No."

"It's a robotic plug. A Platinum X700, top of the line. From Alpha Zen."

“Oh.” Azka continued to stare at the device, comprehension slowly dawning. “Oh!”

“Yes. You know what a plug is, I take it?”

Azka nodded. “Of course. But I’ve never seen one...like that.”

“My understanding is, since you’re a Class-A pet, you’re sexually experienced, though you’ve never been penetrated yourself. Is that assumption correct?”

“Yes.”

“Then, this will help prepare you for...well, for me, to be blunt. It will open you gradually over a few hours. That will be much better for you. So. Why don’t you take your wrap off, and lie face down on the bed, and we’ll get started.”

“Yes, Master.” Azka removed his wrap with a flick of his wrist, revealing his completely erect organ.

“On second thought,” Voshka replied, tossing the device onto the bed, “I think we need to take care of you first.”

“Oh! Thank you, Master!”

“Would you like to perform for me again? Or shall I pleasure you?”

“Um,” Azka stammered, his cheeks flushing hot. “Whatever...you want, Master.”

“You don’t need to be so formal. Forget whatever they taught you at the Academy--just tell me straight out what you want.”

“I want you to...pleasure me.”

Voshka smiled. “Ah. That would have been my choice as well.”

With that, the Commander dropped to his knees before his new pet, spreading his legs open with his hands.

Azka gasped, shivering from his touch.

Sliding his hand around the boy’s shaft, Voshka proceeded to explore him with his tongue, kissing him and sucking gently on the tip of his shaft.

“Ohhhh,” Azka moaned. “Master, I am sorry! I am sorry, but--uhhh!”

With that, the young pet ejaculated, his hot seed shooting down the Commander’s throat.

Voshka looked up, smiling as he swallowed the boy's salty gift.

"I'm sorry," Azka repeated, mortified that he had been unable to control himself.

"Nothing to apologize about. You're very sweet."

"I was...so aroused. I've never felt like that before."

"That would be because of the cider. Iason's chef told me that the punch was accidentally spiked with Tarnacsian cider. Do you know what that is?"

Azka nodded, surprised. Every Academy-bred pet knew about the cider, though he had never imagined he would have the opportunity to try it. Tarnacsia was contraband on Amoi, available only to Furniture, though it was sought after on the Black Market.

"Did you drink any of it?"

"A few cups," Azka remembered.

"You're going to feel it for the next few hours, certainly. We'll have plenty of time to take things...more slowly. So." Now Voshka rose to his feet, retrieving the device. "Lie back on the bed...on your stomach."

Azka obeyed, and the Commander proceeded to strap the device onto him so that it was positioned firmly at the critical place. He adjusted the soft-tipped arms so that they pushed the flesh of his glutes apart for better access to the boy's portal. Then, he pressed the plug-head appendage up against the tiny opening, and turned the device on.

"It's self lubricating," he remarked, as the plug began slowly vibrating against Azka's entrance. "It will gradually penetrate you over the next few hours, so just try to relax."

"Yes, Master." The pet closed his eyes, enjoying the stimulation of the device, and feeling sleepy after his release.

"I'll be back when you're ready for me," the Commander promised, then left the room.

As he made his way toward the great hall, Aki and Suuki suddenly came running toward him.

Both boys were almost completely naked; Aki wore his cape, helmet, and boots over his bare flesh, squirt-gun in hand, while

Suuki sported a makeshift helmet of a saucepan on his head, a recently borrowed Blondie's cape trailing behind him on the floor.

The boys skidded to a halt upon apprehending the Commander, looking up at him with awe.

"Well now. What do we have here?" Voshka asked, trying to keep from laughing.

"Are you the Commander?" Aki demanded, eyes wide.

"If you mean Commander Khosi, then, yes." Now Voshka crouched down, grinning at the boys. "And one of you must be Aki?"

"Me! And this is Suuki. He's my best friend. We met today."

Suuki nodded, too overwhelmed by Voshka's presence to speak.

"I see. And...might I inquire into your...most interesting choice of apparel? Or should I say...lack of apparel?"

"We like being naked!" Aki announced, pointing up to the ceiling as though the inspiration for nakedness resided there.

"It was Aki's idea," Suuki clarified.

"And I must say, I heartily approve. All Commanders should enjoy being naked, in my view. I understand you have military aspirations, Aki?"

Aki blinked for a moment, puzzling over the word aspirations.

"Yes, I want to be a Commander, just like you!"

"Me too," Suuki asserted.

"I'm flattered. Then, it would only be fitting for me to invite both you to complete your apprenticeships with me, when it comes time during your training."

Aki and Suuki looked at each other, wide-eyed.

"You mean go to Alpha Zen?"

"Yes. When the time is right--I suppose that would be in about...seven years? Would you be interested?"

"Yes!" both boys yelled, excited.

"On one condition," Voshka added, smiling, his eyes twinkling. "You must promise to dress like this on a regular basis while at my palace."

The young would-be Commanders both giggled.

“We will,” Aki promised.

“Excellent.” Voshka rose to his feet. “Now. If you’ll excuse me, I have of a matter of some urgency to attend to.”

“We excuse you,” Aki replied. “Do you have to pee?”

Voshka laughed. “That’s a personal question, wouldn’t you say? Run along now, and do whatever it is you were doing.”

“We’re looking for secret passages,” Suuki announced.

“Ah. Then, I hope you find them.”

“Bye!” Aki darted off, excited, and Suuki followed him. Aki began an impromptu performance of the song We’re Going to Alpha Zen!, an extemporaneous musical celebration of Commander Khosi’s invitation, which also included gymnastic components such as leaping and random kicking. Suuki chimed in.

* * *

“Hey. Where the hell is Tai? He said he would bring us some food,” Askel complained.

Freyne shrugged. “Dunno, but I’m thirsty, too.”

“Why don’t you go in there and get us something?”

“You go in there. I’m too tired to stand up.”

Askel paused, listening. “What the fuck are they doing in there?”

“Do I look like a psychic?”

“I don’t know what you look like.”

“Well, I can’t magically project into other rooms and see what’s going on. Go get us some refreshments, then you can have a look around.”

Askel contemplated this, looking disinclined to move. “What if we could magically project into other rooms?”

“Then I’d magically project you out of this one.”

“Aren’t you at all curious about what’s going on in there?”

“What I want to know is where the fuck is Odi?”

“Call him.”

“He said if we called him again, he’d shove the phone up our asses.”

“Well,” Askel replied, after a moment, “he can’t shove it up BOTH our asses. At least not at the same time.”

“You call him then.”

“That is...unless...we’d have to be like, back to back--”

“Do you have to say every random thing that comes into your head?” Freyn demanded.

“At least I HAVE random things in my head. Unlike SOME people.”

“You say that like randomness is an attribute.”

“I mean YOUR head is EMPTY,” Askel replied.

“Oh? I thought you weren’t psychic. How do you know what’s in my head?”

“It doesn’t take a psychic to know you’re an idiot.”

“I’m an idiot?” Freyn laughed. “And which one of us was it who tried to write a letter with a pen stuck up his ass?”

Askel blushed. “I didn’t know it would get stuck up in there. You made me sit on it!”

“But who puts a pen up his ass? Only an idiot.”

“You mean that wasn’t a pen you fucked me with that one time?”

“Shithead,” Freyn grumbled.

Askel laughed. “Pen-dick!”

“We already established that I’m bigger than YOU.”

“Oh? I seem to recall that was never resolved to my satisfaction.”

“That’s only because no one wants to look at your penis to decide.”

“You said we established it.”

“We established it because it’s evidentially true.”

“Evidentially? Is that even a word?”

“I mean it’s a priori knowledge.”

“What the fuck is a priori knowledge?”

“Something that...just is. It’s true from the very beginning.”

“The beginning of what?”

“Of...the universe.”

Askel flipped upon his communicator and brought up the dictionary option. “Evidentiarily. Nope. Not in there.”

“You spelled it wrong.”

“I didn’t spell it, I said it, retard. It’s voice activated, duh?”

“Give me that,” Freyn demanded, grabbing for the handheld device. The brothers struggled over it for a few minutes until the communicator finally went flying across the room.

“Idiot! You probably broke it!”

“It’s not broken. Those things are impossible to break,” Freyn countered.

Askel got up and retrieved it, punching a few buttons. “You DID break it, moron!”

Freyn sighed, exasperated. “Give it here,” he said, snapping his fingers.

“No! You’ll just break it even more.”

“How can something be more broken? It’s broken or it’s not.”

“That’s not true. There are...degrees of brokenness.”

“Well, you can’t use it no matter how broken it is, so let me have a look.”

Askel sighed, tossing the unit to him. Freyn reached out to catch it but the unit hit his knee, falling to the ground.

“See! Now it’s even more broken.”

“Can I help it if you throw like a girl?” Freyn grumbled, rubbing his knee.

“How would YOU know what a girl throws like, you’ve never even been around one, except your sister.”

“I’ve been around more girls than YOU.”

“Ha! Everyone knows you don’t even like girls. That’s...a priori knowledge.”

Freyn blushed at this, pretending to be absorbed in his communicator repair project.

“Do you?” Askel prompted, after a moment.

“Do I what?”

“Do you like girls?”

He shrugged. “They’re okay.”

Askel smiled. “I knew it.”

Freyn scowled, refusing to encourage the conversation with a reply.

After some moments of silence, Askel continued. “Anyway, we wouldn’t have to magically project into rooms to see what’s going on. We could just activate the cameras and tape everything.”

Now Freyn sat back in chair, sighing with disgust. “See? That’s what I’m talking about. Randomness. You don’t know how to carry on a normal conversation.”

“And you do? Don’t you have to be like, NORMAL, to carry on a normal conversation?”

“Define normal,” Freyn grumbled.

“Normal is--”

“Are you going in there or what?”

Askel sighed, rising. “All right. You’d better have that fixed by the time I get back.”

Freyn answered this by flipping him off.

Askel started inside and then turned back. “Normal is like, the opposite of you. Like, a priori since the beginning of the universe, there was you and then there was normal. Which is everything else. And since you are so NOT normal, you sort of balance out the universe. It’s like--”

“Askel!”

Askel laughed, then turned and entered the penthouse a little tentatively. He knew that, technically, he wasn’t supposed to leave his post, but they had been sitting outside for hours, and he was dying of thirst.

He looked around, noting an upended small table on the floor and some broken punch cups. The great hall was deserted, though he could hear loud bumps and scuffling sounds and--was he imagining it?--sounds of sex, coming from various parts the penthouse.

Shaking his head, he spied the refreshment table, and gravitated to it.

“Oh, punch!” he exclaimed, delighted. He peered into the bowl, frowning when he realized most of it was gone--the bowl was only about one-third full, tiny fragments of ice floating along its frothy amber surface. Deciding that he and Freyn were entitled to it, he picked up the bowl and carried the entire thing back outside.

Freyn snorted. “Pig! I didn’t say bring the whole thing!”

“This is all that’s left. There wasn’t any food.”

“What about cups?”

“They were all broken.”

“We’ll use the ladle, I guess.” Freyn scooped out some of the punch and took a drink.

“Don’t drink all of it!”

“What? I just took a sip!”

“Let me have some.”

Freyn handed him the ladle. “So...what are they doing in there?”

Askel shrugged. “There was no one in the great hall. And there was...like...all this stuff knocked over. It kinda sounded like people were...I don’t know...doing sexual...things.”

Snorting, Freyn grabbed the ladle back and took another drink. “In your dreams, pervert.”

“I’m just saying that’s what it sounded like.”

“Hmmm.”

“Did you fix my thing?”

“Askel, no one can fix your thing. It’s beyond help.”

“I mean the communicator!”

Freyn laughed. “Yeah, I fixed it. Told you I would.”

At that moment, the elevator to the penthouse floor opened and Odi stepped out.

“Where the fuck have you been?” Freyn demanded.

Odi shook his head, sighing, then approached them and sat down on the bench that lined the wall.

“Want some punch?” Askel offered, holding out the ladle.

“Sure.” Odi took a sip, and then drained the ladle.

Freyn studied him. “Did you even sleep?”

“No. It was just...one thing after the other.”

“So...what happened with the break-in thing?” Askel asked.

“That was bizarre. We think it’s related to an unauthorized entry on the main level security. There was...I guess...a Blondie that gained access to the building and then to Megala’s suite. I mean, he triggered the automatic security clearance, you know, based on his Blondie genetic code. But then--here’s the weird part--the logs couldn’t identify him. He came up as ‘No Match’ to the existing database.”

“That’s impossible,” Freyn replied. “All the Blondies are in the database. That comes directly from Jupiter.”

“I know. That’s what we can’t figure out. But we discovered his same signature in Megala’s entry logs, except in that case, he fiddled with the panel to gain access.”

“Fuck,” Askel exclaimed. “I didn’t know anyone could do that.”

Odi shook his head. “Neither did I.”

“Well, he can’t be a Blondie, if he’s not in the database,” Freyn remarked.

“Then how did he gain access via Blondie authorization?”

“Maybe some device we’re not aware of?”

“No. The scanner detects genetic code. Actually, Blondie authorization only scans for the Blondie signature and the identification program only kicks in afterwards for logging purposes.”

“So he has the Blondie genetic signature and gained access, but then the identification program failed?”

“Yep.”

Askel shook his head. “That’s fucked up.”

“Wait till Jupiter finds out,” Freyn remarked.

“Why wouldn’t Jupiter know already?”

“Did you read any of the Security Manual, Askel?” Freyn demanded.

Askel blushed. “I read...part of it.”

“Logs are only uploaded into her mainframe once a week. It keeps traffic orderly, since logs are low priority and don’t really need to be uploaded continuously,” Odi explained. “We have until...the day after tomorrow to figure this out before Jupiter knows there’s a problem.”

Freyn sat back in his chair, puzzling over this news. “So...he’s a Blondie. But not a Blondie that we know of. Therefore, he’s not a Blondie.”

“He’s a Blondie, but he’s not,” Odi agreed.

“What did he take from Megala’s suite?”

“That’s the other weird part. Megala claims he broke into his safe but he only took one thing: the blueprints to this building.”

“Why would anyone do that?” Askel wondered aloud. “You can get those off any public terminal.”

“Not these blueprints. Remember, Megala designed this tower. From what I understand, there are rooms and secret passages that no one even knows about--not even Jupiter,” Odi replied.

“Is that what he told you?”

Odi shook his head. “No, but that’s the rumor, anyway. He seemed pretty distressed, but he wouldn’t tell me why.”

“We should make him tell us,” Freyn remarked.

“He’s probably tripping because he’s afraid Jupiter will get hold of the plans and discover he built all this unauthorized stuff into the design and then hid it from her,” Odi speculated.

Askel nodded. “He probably crapped his pants.”

“Well,” Odi continued, drinking another ladle-full of punch, “at least I was productive on one count.” He held up a palm-sized device, wiggling it.

Freyn opened his eyes, surprised. “A residual scanner! Where did you get it?”

“Actually, I went over to the convention center and tracked one down there.”

“Are you going to scan the penthouse now?”

“Yeah, after I grab a smoke. Iason’s been on me about it.”

“You need some sleep,” Freyn remarked. “You look like hell.”

“Thanks,” Odi replied, wryly. “So...I’m going inside now.”

“Thanks for drinking all the punch,” Askel teased, peering at the empty punch bowl.

“Sorry. I was...thirsty.”

“Hey! Is there such a word as ‘evidentiarally’?”

“Fuck if I know,” Odi shrugged, ignoring the brothers as they launched into another argument.

He went inside, looking around and frowning when he saw the disarray of the great hall.

“Where is everyone?” he muttered aloud, then headed down the guest wing toward the garden. As he passed by various doors, he could hear the unmistakable sounds of copulation emanating from within the rooms.

He shook his head. He wasn’t even that surprised--probably some illicit party game Iason had devised.

Once he reached the garden, he relaxed, leaning back on the bench before the pond. Someone had already retracted the greenhouse awning and he shivered a bit in the cold. Though it had stopped snowing, it was most definitely still winter.

After enjoying a nice long smoke, he flipped on the residual scanner, curious to see if anything would be detected. He was surprised when the alarm light immediately began flashing red--indicating very high levels of residuals.

Daryl had been right.

Tossing his cigarette butt over the balcony ledge, he made his way toward the pool, studying the screen to determine where the highest--and most recent--residuals were located.

He stopped in front of the pool, puzzled. According the screen, the pool was surrounded by high levels of residual imprints, of recent origin. It almost looked as if...a ring encircled the pool.

A ring....

Odi suddenly thought of a pet ring; then his thoughts wandered to a cock ring. Then he began thinking about Tai...in his bed...and a tight light pink ring that he very much wanted to explore.

He looked down, as if to verify that he had just sprung a massive erection.

Bewildered, he wondered if the scanner was somehow emitting G-waves. Something was stimulating him--and fast.

His heart started to pound. Without even thinking about it, he found himself heading toward the kitchen. He slipped the scanner in his pocket, for the moment too distracted to consider the implications of his discovery.

All he could think of was his need, and his mounting desire.
For Tai.

* * *

“But...I feel really really horny,” Daryl whimpered.

“I told you. You’re never using that thing again. I should have thrown it out,” Katze replied.

They were lying together on the bed. Though he had mostly recovered from Katze’s punishment, Daryl was now pouting.

“But I NEED something.”

Katze rolled over on his side, looking down at him. “You know what your problem is? You think too much about sex.”

“How is that a problem?” Daryl demanded.

“You know what I mean. You’ve forgotten what it’s all about. It not just...the orgasms, you know. It’s about intimacy. We can still have that. And...if you want to know the truth, I’m a little hurt when you act like that’s not enough.”

Daryl fell silent, considering. “I didn’t mean it like that. You know that. It’s just that...it wasn’t until recently that I even HAD a lover.”

“Right. And what does a lover do? He loves.” Katze leaned forward, kissing Daryl’s nose. “I can still love you, whether or not we get off.”

Daryl smiled. “That’s true. And I love, you, too. But...I’m still horny.”

"I know," Katze sighed. "I am, too. I think Riki was right. He said something was in the punch." He shifted positions, sliding his leg over Daryl's body, between his legs.

"Kiss me."

Smiling, Katze obeyed this mandate, bending down to explore his lover's mouth in a long, slow kiss. He broke off, shivering.

"That was hot," Daryl remarked. "Kiss me again."

Katze needed no further persuasion; he felt like he could kiss him forever. It was a kiss of such incredible sweetness that he felt he might burst from it, simply tear open, his love for Daryl spilling out everywhere, impossible to contain.

"Daryl," he whispered. "I want us to be together...always. I feel as though...I can't really put it into words, but...I need you. I need you to live. You're like...my oxygen now. Sometimes I even feel like I can read your thoughts."

"I feel that way, too," Daryl replied, then waited for what he felt was a long enough pause before adding, "will you finger-fuck me now?"

At this, Katze laughed. "You little pervert. I'm trying to be all serious and romantic here."

"I know. But...I'm really REALLY horny. Will you, please?"

"Of course, love. But...you realize you're not going to be able to come. Why don't we just hold each other for awhile?"

"All right." Daryl's expression betrayed his reluctance on this point. "You said you would ask Iason about...restoration."

"I will. When the moment is right. But," now Katze frowned, reaching down to stroke the side of his lover's face. "You're missing my point. What if Iason says no? What then?"

"I thought you wanted to be restored."

"I do. Of course--that would be...heaven. You're...not understanding me. I'm trying to tell you that I don't NEED to be restored. The only thing I need is you."

Now Daryl's eyes watered, his lip trembling. "Now you're trying to make me feel bad for wanting it."

“Daryl,” Katze sighed, pulling him close. “That’s not what I’m trying to do, at all. Forget it. Look. I’ll talk to Iason like I said I would. But I can’t promise anything. That’s all I’m saying. No promises. And I’m trying to tell you that even if we can never...climax again, we can still be lovers. We can still love.”

“I know.” Daryl closed his eyes, relaxing into Katze’s arms, then sighed. “I don’t know what’s wrong with me. You’re right. Of course you’re right.”

“All that matters is that I have my baby.”

Daryl opened his eyes, puzzled. “You have a baby?”

“Silly boy,” Katze laughed, kissing him on the cheek. “I mean you.”

“Oh.” Now Daryl smiled, snuggling closer. “Yes. You have me.”

* * *

“If I come again, my cock is gonna fall off,” Riki announced unceremoniously. “You’re crushing me, by the way.”

Iason sighed opening his eyes, and then nuzzling against his pet’s face. It felt so perfect, lying on top of the mongrel’s warm body, his organ still gripped--though more loosely now--by Riki’s inner embrace.

He nibbled Riki’s earlobe and then whispered into his ear.

“I love you, Riki.”

This time, he wasn’t going to demand that Riki profess his love for him. He wanted those words to come from him without coercion--freely.

He waited, but when his pet made no reply, he withdrew, suddenly overcome with hurt. He sat on the edge of the bed, looking away, and then made a move to get up.

“Iason, wait.”

Riki moved up onto one elbow and reached out, his fingers instinctively toying with the Blondie’s long, silky hair. “I know I don’t say it often but...actually...I love you, too.”

Closing his eyes, Iason released a great sigh, then spun around and gathered up his pet into his arm, pressing him close. It meant so much to him to hear these words that his eyes stung with hot tears.

“Crushing me again,” Riki remarked after a moment, his voice muffled by Iason’s body.

Iason released his grip, then looked down at him, smiling. “Riki,” he whispered.

“Yeah?”

“I want...that is...I’d like to buy you a special present. Anything you’d like.”

Riki snorted at this. “Anything? How about my own car?” he teased.

“If that’s what you’d like.”

Now Riki sat bolt upright. “Seriously? Fuck! You mean...ANY car I want?”

Iason smiled at his pet’s enthusiasm. “Any vehicle.”

“And I can drive it...I mean, go out and stuff?”

“Yes, my love.”

“Fuck yes!” Excited, Riki bounced a little on the bed. “I already know which one!”

“Which one, pet?”

“A Zerovian!”

Iason laughed. “The most expensive car on Amoi.”

“You said any one!”

“And you shall have it, my love.” Iason reached down and kissed him on the forehead.

“When can we get it? Tomorrow?”

“If you like.”

“Yes! I would most definitely like! And...hey. Where’s my bike?”

Iason thought about this for a moment. “It’s still in the trunk of my vehicle, I believe.”

“Do I still get to keep that?”

“Of course.”

“AND ride it?”

“Yes, my pet.”

Riki leaned back on his elbows, grinning. “Why are you being so nice?”

“Because you’re my pet and I love you. I’ve told you before, Riki, that I want you to be happy with me. I want you to enjoy your life here. There’s...almost nothing you could ask for, that I wouldn’t give you.”

His pet studied him for a moment. Almost nothing. And he knew the one thing that Iason would never give him.

His freedom.

“Is it because I told you I love you?”

“Partly,” Iason conceded. “That pleased me very much.”

“I do, you know. That’s why I got so jealous over Vosh and all. If I didn’t love you, I wouldn’t give a fuck. That’s why it hurt...so bad.”

Iason nodded, looking away for a moment as if considering something, and then turning to look at him again.

“Riki. There’s something I want to tell you. About Voshka Khosi.”

“Yeah?” Riki swallowed hard, his heart starting to beat faster. He suddenly knew what was coming, something that he had privately guessed at, that he had mulled over in his thoughts.

“Do you remember when we first met? You offered to give your body to me rather than be in my debt.”

Riki nodded. How could he possibly forget that? That was how he came to be Iason’s pet, although, at the time, he had only meant to give him a single night of pleasure. But Iason had wanted more, took more than the mongrel could ever have imagined he would claim.

“I have a similar situation. With Voshka. I’m...indebted to him.”

“How so?”

"I told you about his brother, Anori? What I told you about the crash wasn't true." Iason paused for a moment, staring down at the bed. Then, he looked at Riki. "He died...at my hand."

For a long moment Riki made no reply, returning his gaze. "I thought so," he said, finally.

Now Iason was surprised.

"I knew there was something going on. So...you paid off your debt with your body?"

"In a matter of speaking."

"Does he know?"

"No. And you must never tell anyone."

"I won't."

Now Riki thought about this for a moment. He wanted to ask why he had done it, but he decided to let Iason tell him in his own time. Instead, he smiled. "Do you remember what you told me when I offered my body to you that day?" He changed his expression, a look of disdain shifting his features. "How very mongrel-like," he whispered, in perfect imitation of the Blondie's insulting reply. "Guess that means you and I aren't so different, after all."

"No," Iason conceded, smiling. "Perhaps not."

"And now we both have blood on our hands. So we're on the same page there, too."

"Hmmm."

"Iason?"

"Yes, love?"

"Why did you tell me? Now, I mean."

The Blondie reached down and kissed him softly on the lips. "Just because...I wanted to. Now," he added, uncuffing Riki's chains, "we should get dressed and get back to the party."

"I don't know," Riki replied, grinning. "It seems like the party was in here." He reached for his shirt, suddenly feeling, for the first time in a long, long while--happy. He was thrilled that Iason had opened up to him and equally excited about the promise of a new car. He had his cigarette privileges back, with assurances that he could visit the Saloon.

Perhaps it wasn't so bad to be Iason's pet, after all.

Riki had to admit--any other mongrel, or pet, for that matter, would say he had it made. He had won the heart of the Blondie whose love he had come to treasure, more than he would even admit to himself. He held these things in the shelter of his own heart, finding comfort in them, even in the face of a life without freedom.

He could wear his chains now because he had come to realize that they meant nothing; his soul was already fettered to his Blondie Master, whether or not his wrists carried the gold-plated initials. And he knew, deep inside, that would never really be free now, even if Iason let him go back to Ceres.

And that was something he knew Iason would never do.

* * *

Yousi gazed up at Heiku in surprise. He opened his mouth to speak, and then shut it again. The look in Heiku's eyes was unmistakable. And suddenly...undeniably familiar.

Heiku smiled at his reaction. "Do you know what I have in mind, Yousi?"

His brow furrowing, Yousi seemed deep in thought for a moment. "Heiku," he answered, finally, "were we...I mean to say, you and I, that is, mmmm...were we--at one time...at one time....lovers?"

The Blondie had leaned closer to hear what Yousi tried to say, for the Blondie had begun to stammer and mumble as he often did, and Heiku was quite accustomed to having to do so just to make out what he was trying to say. But this time, just Yousi said the word "lovers," he looked into his eyes with a sudden flicker of comprehension, his remembrance lighting up his features with an intelligence Heiku had not seen since before his modification.

"Yousi," he whispered, overcome with emotion. He gathered him up in his arms and pulled him close, kissing him in the way he

had wanted to for so long, with a passion that betrayed his years of waiting, and longing.

He felt as though he couldn't get enough, for as soon as he had Yousi in his arms again, it was clear that his old pairing partner was responding to him, just as he once had. Thrilled, he moved his hands up and down Yousi's body, almost too excited to know where to begin.

"Yes," he hissed, finally, forcing himself to break away, and then--spying a vulnerable expanse of throat, immediately assaulted it with tiny bites and kisses that made Yousi shudder.

"Heiku! That...that...."

"Your body remembers," Heiku whispered, nuzzling against his cheek. "Isn't that right?"

"I--I...don't know. Ohh!"

"Don't try to fight it," he soothed. "Just let go." With that, he unfastened Yousi's tunic and slid his hand inside, pushing back the fabric to touch his warm skin. Forcing himself to pause and slow down, Heiku gently began to twist and flick the Blondie's nipples, stimulating them in just the way he knew Yousi couldn't resist.

"Ummm...." Yousi was beside himself with lust, but he felt confused--a bit overwhelmed. "Ohh!"

"It's all right, my darling. You love this. Remember?"

"Help," Yousi whimpered. "Help me."

Heiku immediately pulled back, frowning. "I'm sorry. Do you want to stop?"

"There is going to be a stain on my paints," Yousi announced. "If you don't stop."

At this, Heiku couldn't help but laugh. "Is that all you're worried about?"

Yousi peered down at the impressive bulge in his trousers. "Also, my penis is...moving. It doesn't usually do that. So much, I mean."

"Hmmm." Heiku slid his bionic hand slowly down Yousi's stomach, eliciting an involuntary gasp from his sensitive lover. He worked the fastening open with the admirable ease--a mere flick of

his finger. Besides having the deftness of a surgeon, he had the advantage of state-of-the-art technology hardwired into his own anatomy. He allowed the remarkable phalanges to gently slide the length of Yousi's shaft, noting how tightly his skin was pulled over the jerking organ.

Yousi cried out, grabbing onto Heiku's arms as though he were about to fall.

"I've never seen you quite this aroused," Heiku remarked, forced to adjust his own fully matured erection, which was positioned uncomfortably in the tight confines of his form-fitting pants. He was trying to be patient--what he really wanted was to throw Yousi to the floor and ride him with unbridled enthusiasm, but he knew his old lover wasn't ready for that...yet.

"Let's see. I do believe...you preferred setting number 4, isn't that right?" With a knowing smile, Heiku activated the self-lubricating vibration function of his prosthesis, closing his fingers around Yousi's considerable girth with enviable precision. He held his old pairing partner exactly right, with the perfect amount of pressure, and began pumping him expertly, his sensors responding to his blood flow and skin changes to adjust pressure and cadence accordingly so that Yousi was brought to arousal in the most pleasurable manner possible.

"That feels good," Yousi proclaimed, rather loudly, then he began to gasp erratically, pushing against the tall Blondie's chest as though trying to push him away. "Ohh!! Watch out! Your hand will get...wet."

"My hand is already wet," Heiku smiled.

"It's going to, now!"

The Blondie couldn't resist teasing him, just a bit. "It's going to...what?"

"You know what it does! It's going to do it! Ohhh!"

"Don't tell me you're going to ejaculate," Heiku replied, with mock sternness. "Surely you can hold it in."

Yousi, mistaking his teasing for a serious concern, closed his eyes tightly so he wouldn't have to face the Blondie's reproach when

he liberated his anxious seed, something which now seemed impossible to stop.

It was going to happen.

With a loud, unrestrained groan--every muscle in his body straining and tensing as he approached his peak--he climaxed, his seed spraying up in explosive arcs onto his own stomach and dripping down Heiku's fingers in a mesmerizing fountain of unharnessed sexuality.

He was almost afraid to open his eyes, for fear that Heiku would reprimand him.

"I'm guessing that was as good as it looked," Heiku whispered, finally, releasing his hold on Yousi's retreating organ.

The spent Blondie opened one eye, warily.

"I've missed that sound." Heiku gazed down at him, his features now tight with urgency. "Oh, Yousi. I need you, so desperately. Please, let me take you?"

Surprised that Heiku wasn't angry with him, Yousi relaxed, then nodded.

The slight motion was all Heiku needed. Almost frantically, he kissed Yousi again, pushing him back and up against the wall as his hands began groping his body. He felt his throat grow tight, his reticent emotion suddenly separating and lifting from a place deep within--from a vast inner wasteland where it had drifted, escaping from the vexing acuity of his heart.

He broke away, tried to speak, and then found he could not; instead, he kissed Yousi again, and then, with almost savage insistence, flipped the Blondie around so that he faced the wall. He pinned him there, sliding his body up against him as he tugged down the Blondie's trousers roughly, with an authority that Yousi now remembered. Then, he unfastened his own pants to release his cock, which jutted forward eagerly, heavy with his lust.

"Oh my." The pure sensual delight of his ready organ up against Yousi's bared flesh was enough to make Heiku moan with anticipation; he closed his eyes, trying to rein in his desire, but the effect of the cider was making his head spin, so urgent was his need.

“I remember this,” Yousi observed, happily.

“This feels so right. You’re so...warm. I love the way you smell, your hair--even your smooth skin. Everything. It’s just...you. I’ve missed you so. I can’t tell you how much I’ve missed you, Yousi. There hasn’t been a day that’s gone by....”

“Use your finger first. That twirly one,” Yousi suggested, pleased to have recollected that important detail.

Heiku needed no second invitation, immediately inserting his middle finger into the Blondie’s offered ass, rotating and lubricating as he gently bit down on Yousi’s shoulder.

“I missed you dreadfully, but there wasn’t anything I could do about it. That’s why I didn’t come to you. I knew you wouldn’t remember. It would only frighten you.”

Yousi thought about this for a moment, remembering Heiku’s kindness whenever he came into the Bondage shop. “I wasn’t so afraid of you. Not like some of the others.”

“I wasn’t going to force myself on you. And...forgive me for saying this, but--you were so different afterwards. It was like...you weren’t the Yousi I knew. I had to get to know you all over again. It’s taken me a long time to adjust to that. And...do you know something? Until Ima, I hadn’t bought a single pet. I just wanted to be alone and think of you, and somehow, when I fantasized, it was almost as if we were still together.”

“You bought lots of oils,” the Blondie remembered.

“I’ve waited for this...I’ve dreamed about this, for so long.” He kissed his shoulder again. “Your body does remember me. I’ll tell you something else. At first, it was hard for me....but now, I can honestly say, I love you just as much now as I did before you were modified, though in a different way. But I still want you in the same way.”

He slid his finger from Yousi’s grip, then positioned himself at his gates, pressing forward slightly. Then, his hands over Yousi’s hands, fingers intertwined, pushing him firmly up against the wall, he penetrated.

He groaned, his eyes rolling back as he slid completely inside his old lover. He was so stimulated now that his entire body was shaking; he wanted to relish the moment but felt as though he would pass out from need.

Slowly he began to thrust, hardly daring to believe that he was finally inside his old lover again. Yousi felt perfect; he was clamped down on him with intoxicating constriction. Then, the Blondie's sex muscles began to spasm and then contract purposefully against him, pumping him with fatal resolve.

It was too much. Suddenly overcome with desire and passion, Heiku began thrusting hard, grunting, throwing his whole body into a fuck that encroached upon barbaric sensibilities, transporting him to a place of complete domination and power.

And utter sensual pleasure.

"Magnificent! Oh, Yousi. You undo me."

Your ass is gripping me like a hot vice, he thought. And now that I have you again, I shall fuck you night and day. With that, the great Blondie felt his essence rise up from deep within, tugging and climbing, and then, with a low rumble that began in the back of his throat, Heiku brought forth his sexy cry, his semen shooting hard into deep, forbidden spaces.

Shuddering, he struggled to come down from what could only be described as the best orgasm he could ever remember having.

"My ass hurts," Yousi announced, though he had not complained while his old pairing partner had been taking him.

Laughing, Heiku released his old lover, turning him around. "I imagine so. I...wish I could say I was sorry. But...actually...I'm not. I loved that. And I love you, my lovely little darling."

Yousi blinked at this, not sure if he was supposed to say something in reply. He started to speak and then frowned, shaking his head. "Do I love you now, I guess?"

Leaning forward, the Blondie silenced him with a kiss. "Don't try to figure it out today. I'm not expecting you...to feel the same as you once did. It's not...important." Heiku swallowed, knowing this was a lie, but wanting to reassure Yousi, who looked rather pathetic

and anxious. He knew that when things got to be too much, or too confusing, the Blondie would shut down, or become more frazzled.

But this time, the bright-eyed Blondie just seemed a bit bewildered, though not overly so. "I don't have to figure it out today," he nodded, relieved. Then, after a pause, "but I wouldn't mind if we attempted that again, sometime. I like your fingers, and how you touched different regions, and also when you put your tongue in my mouth. I especially like that, when you moved it. That was quite...extraordinary."

Heiku studied him for a moment. Was he just imagining it, or was Yousi's intellect showing some improvement? Perhaps it was more than just returning memories. Perhaps...he was getting his mind back, too.

He smiled. How ironic, after he had just fucked him senseless.

* * *

Voshka slowed his pace as he approached the bedroom off the great hall where Omaki and Enyu had been enjoying unbridled sex in full view of anyone caring to look. Now the pair was spent, at least momentarily, both of them lying on Iason's bed in a state of complete relaxation.

Enyu, physically confused by the premature solicitation of his interval, had fallen asleep, and lay curled up against Omaki's body, one leg thrown possessively over his Master's torso.

Omaki, though nearly asleep himself, was nevertheless starting to become aware of a new surge of carnal impulses, and had been considering ravishing his pet once again, despite Enyu's obvious exhaustion.

But at that moment, the Commander approached the room and stopped, leaning against the doorframe with deliberate nonchalance.

"Well now. What do we have here?"

Raising his head, Omaki took in the Voshka's considerable size, immediately realizing by his dress and his manner that he was none other than Commander Khosi himself.

“Ah. You must be the infamous Commander,” Omaki greeted, a devious smile curling his lips as he apprehended--much to his delight--the Alphazanian’s striking good looks.

“And you must be, at least I think you must be, the notorious Omaki Ghan, proprietor of the Taming Tower?” Voshka returned his smile, equally impressed with the Blondie’s appearance, and having a much more complete view of what Omaki had to offer.

“I imagine you may be a bit...confused by what’s going on here,” Omaki laughed.

Voshka smiled. “Not at all. I learned from Iason’s chef that some Tarnacsian cider was inadvertently placed on the menu. I’m quite familiar with its effects.”

“Then, I hope you’ll excuse me if I seem unusually happy to see you,” the Blondie replied, as he began developing another erection in full view of the watching Commander.

Voshka, who knew his own G-wave implant was exacerbating the Blondie’s physical response, only smiled, reaching down to adjust his own swelling organ, which strained against the confines of his garment.

“Um...perhaps you would care to join me?” Omaki offered, his sharp eyes easily discerning the Commander’s interest.

“You’re most hospitable,” Voshka answered, removing his broach clip and letting his cape drop to the floor. He began to undress, as the Blondie looked on with obvious appreciation.

“Would you mind shutting the door--just hit that button on the panel behind you?” Omaki asked. “I wouldn’t want Aki to see us together; he’s quite a fan of yours, and he might find this confusing.”

“Ah. Aki. Do you mean the delightful boy who is running about the house naked?”

At this, Omaki frowned. “Is he still naked?”

“Not completely. I seem to recall he was wearing a cape and his helmet...and perhaps his boots.”

Omaki sat up, concerned. “Perhaps I ought to see to him.”

“I wouldn’t worry,” Voshka replied, shutting the door and removing the rest of his clothing. “He and the other little one are far too fast for anyone to catch. And everyone seems to have already paired up--the penthouse looks deserted.”

“Hmmm.” The Blondie lay back down, his attention now consumed by the Commander’s nakedness, his eyes gleaming with appreciation for Voshka’s physique. “My, my. Aren’t you the pretty one.”

“I was about to say the same about you,” the Commander replied, smiling. He motioned to Enyu. “And who might this enchanting creature be?”

“This is my pet, Enyu. He’s a Xeronian. But at the moment I fear I’ve worn him out--he came into his interval early, it seems.”

“A Xeronian? Mmmm. I’ve always wanted to try one of those.” Voshka approached the bed, reaching down to fondle himself as he regarded the Blondie sprawled before him. “But since he’s asleep...” The Commander lay down next to Omaki on the bed, moving onto his side and reaching out to run a hot finger down the Blondie’s torso.

Omaki smiled at this, enjoying Voshka’s touch and his warmth. “You smell nice.”

“As do you.”

“I’m sure I smell of sweat,” Omaki protested, laughing.

“You smell of sex,” the Commander corrected, sliding his hand across the Blondie’s stomach. He bent down and took Omaki’s nipple in his mouth, working the bud between his teeth.

Omaki gasped at this, thrilled. “That feels good.”

Enyu stirred, his eyes fluttering open. He regarded the Commander with wide, interested eyes.

“Master, who is this?” he whispered.

Voshka lifted his head, appraising the Xeronian with equal interest. “Ah. You’re awake.”

“This is Commander Khosi,” Omaki explained, feeling suddenly quite comfortable between his pet and his new friend. “Be a good pet and do whatever he says.”

Any other time, Enyu might have felt jealous of someone sharing his Master's bed. But at the moment, the Xeronian only felt a surge of lust, immediately warming up to the idea of a threesome.

"What shall I do, Commander Khosi?" Enyu asked, rather formally.

Voshka reached out and took hold of his chin, studying his face and, in particular, his strange eyes, with the slit pupils so like a feline. "Fascinating."

Enyu's eyes immediately dilated, eliciting a smile from the Commander. "You're an interesting creature. Why don't you just relax for the moment; I'll tell you when I'm ready for you."

The Xeronian nodded, feeling enormously attracted to the handsome Alphazenian, though of course he still preferred his own Master.

"You might move your leg," Voshka prompted, gently pushing his leg from the Blondie's abdomen. Enyu moved his leg away, revealing his own nakedness. His cock, limp just a moment before, now began to swell and lengthen as he watched the Commander pleasure his Master.

Omaki was in utter bliss, his eyes closed as Voshka's hands and mouth began exploring his body, his warm tongue flicking teasingly across his skin. When the Commander moved lower, pushing his legs open to position himself between them, and took his engorged organ into his mouth, he gasped and moaned, his fingers tangled in Voshka's silky-soft, dark hair.

"Oh, Voshka."

Enyu, frowning a bit at this, got up on his knees, sitting back on his heels. "What can I do, Commander Khosi?" he asked, rather loudly. Then, when Voshka did not answer right away, he poked at the man's arm. "Commander Khosi?"

Voshka raised his head, his eyes half-shut with lust. "What is it, little pet?"

"I want to pleasure my Master, too," Enyu replied, anxiously.

The Commander smiled. "Indeed. Well then, suppose I have your Master turn over and get onto his knees? I'll taste him from

behind and you can do as you please. That is, if Omaki is amenable to the idea.”

Omaki needed no further invitation, immediately flipping over and positioning himself for a good rimming, legs wide apart. He looked back, grinning.

Enyu was equally happy with this arrangement, attending to his Master’s rigid erection with his tongue and hands while the Commander pressed Omaki’s cheeks apart and began exploring him with his tongue.

The dual stimulation from Enyu and the Commander was almost too much to bear. “Holy Jupiter,” he breathed, gasping and wiggling back, anxious for more stimulation. “Oh yes. This is perfect.”

Commander Khosi, although enjoying these activities immensely, was now troubled by an onerous erection that demanded his consideration. He reached out and found Enyu’s hand, bringing it to his cock and encouraging the pet to fondle him as he pleased the Blondie. Enyu cooperated fully, and Voshka became so aroused that he began making small noises, the vibration of his mouth against Omaki’s portal stimulating the Blondie even more.

“Oh yes!” Omaki cried, so overcome with pleasurable sensations that he was almost drooling.

Voshka could bear it no longer. He withdrew, immediately substituting his tongue with his organ, sliding his length into the Blondie’s ass with a deep, resonant groan. He shivered when Omaki bucked back against him.

“Give me a good fucking,” the Blondie hissed, so aroused that he was ready to spill his seed.

“Indeed I shall,” the Commander replied, his voice harsh with lust.

“Keep doing that, Enyu,” Omaki instructed. “Just like that, with your tongue.”

Enyu mumbled his assent, his mouth filled with his Master’s arousal.

“I’m going to climax in just a moment,” Omaki announced, “and you must drink every drop.”

Voshka grabbed hold of the Blondie’s hips, pulling him back as he began thrusting hard--and then almost violently--into Omaki’s sanctum.

“That’s very...oh, yes. Here it is, Enyu!” Omaki gave a few grunts as he orgasmed, his seed expelled into his pet’s waiting mouth. His release triggered a contraction of his inner muscles, the spasms clamping down on the Commander’s organ.

“Gaman help me,” Voshka whispered, eyes rolling back as he was brought to his brink by the Blondie’s unbearably erotic twitching. He ejaculated, shuddering as copious amounts of his semen shot into Omaki, every muscle in his body quivering as he groaned his pleasure.

Enyu, unable to wait for anyone to see to his own needs, brought himself to orgasm by hand, adding his own sex cry to the mix.

“That was probably,” Omaki gasped, after a moment, “the best sexual experience I’ve ever had.”

“I’m rather pleased to make your acquaintance as well,” Voshka agreed, lying back on the bed, his eyes closed with contentment.

“What about me, Commander Khosi?” Enyu demanded.

Voshka opened an eye, smiling. “You were delightful, little pet. And you needn’t keep calling me ‘Commander Khosi.’ Vosh will suffice.”

“Was I good, Master?” Enyu continued, rubbing up against Omaki’s body.

“As always, Enyu. You’re a good pet.”

Smiling, Enyu settled down beside his Master, with the Commander on the Blondie’s other side, and the three of them proceeded to fall fast asleep.

* * *

Tai rushed around the kitchen, deciding to concentrate on making sure the dinner was perfect rather than dwelling on Iason's threat to punish him. There was nothing he could do about the situation now; and he knew, from experience, that once the effects of the cider wore off, everyone in the hall would be famished.

Since he was no longer sure when the dinner hour would be, he decided to set everything out on the table in warming domes. That way, whenever everyone gathered in the hall, all would be ready.

He had already set the table, using their best Aristian crystal and silver-trimmed plates, and now proceeded to lay the dishes out. Not realizing that the Blondies and other Elite usually ate separately from the Furniture and pets--since Iason never practiced this custom in his own home and had not advised him otherwise--Tai had extended the table to allow everyone to sit at it, transforming the room into a banquet hall. He had put a fine white tablecloth on it, with an intricate red and yellow design along the trim, and added several arrangements of white candles. In addition, vases of red and yellow Amoian roses, newly opened, lined the table at intervals.

He had prepared the menu according to Iason's rather exact specifications: an Aristian pheasant--slow-roasted over a live fire, a lamb's head boiled to tender perfection, skewered kalama roots and mushrooms, stewed apples with cinnamon, fresh tossed greens with a tangy Amoian vinegar dressing, blue sweet corn off the husk, steamed snails, mashed potatoes with pheasant gravy, hot buns just out of the oven--brushed with melted garlic butter, and tender winter sprouts smothered in a rich cheese sauce. To drink, there was the finest wine, flavored waters and cold Gardanian cowberry tea, or any number of selections from the beverage dispenser for the more finicky diners.

And of course, coffee and dessert.

The food was carefully arranged on the long table, warming domes over each dish, and Tai stood admiring his work, pleased with how everything had turned out. At that moment, Odi came into the hall and, spying him, immediately made for him.

"Tai," he whispered, a bit breathlessly.

The Aristian turned, smiling. "You're back! I didn't see--"

His reply was silenced by Odi's demanding kiss, the bodyguard's hands roaming his body wildly, eagerly.

Tai broke away. "Don't tell me you drank the cider!"

"Hmmm?" Odi was far too aroused to bother replying, kissing him again, this time more insistently.

Tai tried to back away, and Odi pinned him to the wall, sliding an impatient hand down the boy's pants.

"Oh! Odi! We...we can't!" Blushing, yet responding to Odi's groping fingers, Tai turned his head away, trying to escape the bodyguard's kiss. "The Blondies will be coming to dinner at any moment, and I should be...um...prepared."

"Hush," Odi whispered, biting his neck.

Tai yelped. "That hurt!"

"I'm sorry but...oh, Tai. I simply must have you. Right now." He nuzzled the boy's throat, making his way up to his ear. "You're quite ready for me."

"Be that...be that as it may," Tai gasped, "we can't do this now, Odi! I have to make sure everything is ready!"

"Everything is fine," Odi replied, a bit dismissively. "I need to be inside you. NOW."

"But--"

Refusing to take no for an answer, Odi suddenly picked up his reluctant lover and threw him over his shoulder, carrying him off to his bedroom.

"Odi! Put me down!"

"I will. When we get to the bed."

"I can't leave my post!"

"You can tell Iason I dragged you off and had my way with you," Odi replied, giving Tai's ass a smack.

"Ow! But...I'm not ready!"

"Then I suggest you get ready," the bodyguard replied. He entered his room and made for the bedroom, throwing Tai roughly down on the bed. "Get undressed."

Tai stared up at him, a bit frightened of Odi's hungry expression. The bodyguard stared down at him, hands on his hips. "Shall I undress you, or are you going to obey me?"

"Well," Tai began, uncertainly.

Odi pulled off his own shirt, his muscles flexing as he tossed it aside. He unzipped his pants, releasing his sizeable erection with a small grunt. Tai eyed him anxiously, worried, yet somehow mesmerized by the bodyguard's determined manner.

Stripping off his pants, Odi now got onto the bed, tugging on Tai's shirt. "I said, get undressed."

"I'm afraid," Tai whimpered.

"I'll go slow," Odi replied, though he wondered if he would really be able to keep this promise. He was so aroused he felt ready to burst. With unveiled impatience, he assisted Tai out of his clothes, ripping off his shirt and tugging his pants down, then tossing them behind him. Then he moved on top of the Aristian, enjoying Tai's warm nakedness as he prodded his mouth open with his tongue.

Tai made a noise that was lost in the bodyguard's mouth; Odi responded by flipping onto his back, positioning the Aristian on top of him where he could more easily access his bared ass. He began squeezing the boy's rump, spreading him, and then--after wetting a finger in his mouth--he slipped a digit into him, wiggling his finger.

Tai, for his part, found this both stimulating and frightening, scooting forward in an attempt to escape Odi's probing finger; this only had the effect of exciting the bodyguard further.

"Don't resist," he whispered. "I'm going to make you mine now, Tai." With his other hand, he began coddling the boy's erection, enjoying Tai's whimpers and gasps and the mixed look of fear and desire on his face.

"Odi," Tai pleaded. "I'm not...ready."

"Yes, you are. It's time, Tai." The bodyguard inserted a second digit, now moving both fingers more purposefully to stretch him a bit.

“Oh!” Tai closed his eyes, then opened them, gazing down at Odi with unmistakable arousal.

Odi moved his thumb over the head of his shaft, spreading a bit of early seed over the tip of his cock. “You see? You’re enjoying this.”

Although Tai could not argue with this observation, he was feeling extremely vulnerable and helpless as Odi continued to prepare him for the inevitable. When the bodyguard finally removed his fingers, hands sliding around to the side of his hips, he whimpered again.

“No, Odi,” he pleaded.

“I thought you were prepared to give yourself to me?”

Tai bit his lip, uncertain.

Odi was already lifting his hips, positioning him over his fully erect cock, shaking a bit with anticipation. He couldn’t stop now, no matter what Tai said or did, and so he desperately hoped the Aristian would relax a bit, now the critical moment was imminent.

“Go slow,” Tai whispered, suddenly realizing that--whether he was ready or not--Odi was taking him.

Expelling a small breath, Odi pressed the boy onto his waiting erection, gaining admittance.

Tai yelped, immediately grabbing onto Odi’s arms in an attempt to stop his descent. “It hurts! Don’t go any further!”

Groaning, Odi tried to pause for a moment, but found the temptation to penetrate too strong; ignoring Tai’s pleas, he continued to lower him onto his shaft, thrusting up to achieve total admittance.

Tears now fell from Tai’s cheeks onto Odi’s chest as he struggled with the pain of being opened for the first time.

“I’m sorry,” Odi mumbled, though he kept the boy’s hips firmly in his hands. He closed his eyes, then opened them half-way, looking up at Tai with a smile. “Now you’re mine, Tai. I’m completely inside you. Try to relax. I want this to feel good for you, too.”

Tai sniffed, wiping his face and nodding. Although the penetration had been even more painful than he had imagined it would be, now it was done. He was straddling Odi, the bodyguard's organ pressing against his insides. He was no longer a virgin.

Odi was beside himself with lust. "You look so sweet and sexy, Tai, completely impaled on my shaft. You're so tight, I can hardly stand it. Please don't cry."

"I'm trying not to."

Gazing up at him through half-closed eyes, the bodyguard began moving Tai's body against his organ, thrusting as he raised and lowered the boy's hips. "You feel so good. I won't last long."

After a few moments, Tai began to relax, enjoying the feeling of Odi deep inside him. He reached down and fumbled with his erection, suddenly wanting release.

"Odi," he breathed, his cheeks flushing hot. "That feels good, when you...oh! Right there!"

"Sexy boy," Odi hissed. "That's it, rock against me, just like that."

"I like it," Tai exclaimed. "There's something special in there...oh!"

"You feel that, do you?" Excited, Odi increased the cadence of his fuck, thrusting and moving Tai against him with mounting urgency. "Good boy. Tai! Oh...fuck. I'm coming."

With that, Odi climaxed, followed almost immediately by Tai, who cried out his excitement with such enthusiasm that the bodyguard almost laughed.

Afterwards, as he helped Tai move off him and onto the bed beside him, he leaned over and kissed his cheeks where the tears had dried. "I think you enjoyed that...at least at the end. Did I hurt you very much?"

"A little," Tai conceded. "But...not at the very end."

"Good. I'm sorry...I don't know what got into me. I just had to have you, I'm not even sure why."

"It was the cider," Tai answered, frowning. "I accidentally served an aphrodisiac in the punch. Master Iason is very angry."

Odi laughed. "That explains it. Well, I hope he won't be too hard on you."

"So do I," Tai whispered, worried. "He said he wasn't through with me. What do you think he'll do?"

"You'll probably get a few strikes from that taming stick of his," Odi guessed.

Tai sighed, fretting a bit over this thought.

Pulling him close, Odi kissed his shoulder. "So, you've given yourself to me now, Tai. And I was the first one." The bodyguard seemed rather pleased with this observation, smiling contentedly.

"I don't know if I gave myself to you, exactly," the boy corrected. "More like you took me."

"Fair enough," Odi laughed. "But now you're mine, completely."

Tai found himself smiling at this as he snuggled up against Odi. He was glad they had finally done it. And, even though he had resisted most of the way, he had secretly admired Odi's confident manner, his insistence on taking what he wanted, even if Tai was unwilling to give it. It was this quality of self-assurance that the Aristian found particularly attractive in his lover. He liked how Odi insisted that he belonged to him now.

It felt good, belonging to someone.

* * *

It was evening by the time the Blondies began to make their way back to the great hall. They had all engaged in some sort of sexual encounter, most of them spending the entire afternoon enjoying one pleasure after another.

But now, as the stimulating effects of the cider finally began to wear off, the consequences of having enjoyed hours of sexual gratification began to become apparent to all.

"I'll never be able to ejaculate again," Raoul lamented, groaning as he sunk down into one of the chairs in the great hall.

“Nor will I,” Xian agreed, wincing as he sat down on the divan. “I think I pulled a muscle.”

“My ass hurts,” Yousi announced, sighing as though trying to mimic the other Blondies.

“Does it, now?” Raoul grinned, exchanging a look with Xian. They both turned to Heiku, who shrugged, grinning.

Iason came into the hall, looking decidedly spent. He sat down near the others, too tired to even offer greetings.

“Where’s Omaki?” Heiku asked, looking around.

“Last I saw, he was in Iason’s bedroom,” Raoul commented.

Heiku walked over to the door, pounding on it. “Hey! Omi! Were you planning to join the party?”

After a few moments Omaki emerged, grinning sheepishly. He was followed by the Commander, who was struggling to put his boots back on, immediately excusing himself and making for the bath hall. Enyu stumbled into the great hall behind them, looking half-asleep.

“You fucked the Commander?” Heiku laughed.

Omaki shrugged. “What can I say? He was good in bed.”

Even Iason smiled at this, but refrained from comment. “Riki,” he called out, as soon as the mongrel made his appearance in the hall. “Bring us some wine.”

Riki stopped in his tracks, looking incredulous. “What the fuck? Do I look like a Furniture to you?”

“You look like my pet,” Iason replied, smoothly, “who will do as he’s told or face the consequences.”

“Where’s Toma...or Tai?” Riki replied, ignoring him.

“That’s a good question. I have an issue that needs addressing with Tai.”

“He’s probably hiding from you,” Xian teased.

“What the hell was in that punch?” Heiku demanded.

“I already told you,” Iason replied. “Tarnacsian cider.”

“Aww, don’t be too hard on him,” Riki replied, grinning. “You seemed like you had a pretty good time.”

Iason smiled slightly at this. "Are you going to obey me, Riki, or shall I turn you over my knee in front of our guests?"

The mongrel scowled at this, making for the bar with obvious reluctance, muttering something about being Iason's slave and how Blondies were all lazy and inconsiderate, and perverted, to boot.

"What was that?" Iason asked, sharply.

"I wasn't talking to you," Riki replied, bristling.

"Pet--"

"Tai!" Riki greeted the Aristian, who rushed into the hall looking decidedly flustered, with obvious relief. "They want wine. They were trying to make *me* get it."

"I'm sorry," Tai whispered. "Wine, for everyone?"

"Actually, I'd prefer cognac," Raoul announced.

"As would I," Xian remarked.

"Wine for everyone else?" Tai clarified, looking hesitantly toward the Blondies, though too frightened to make direct eye contact with Master Iason.

"Wine is good. No wait. Make that punch," Heiku quipped, sending the others into stitches.

Tai blushed, looking away.

"I have an announcement to make," Omaki said. "I'm going to be throwing a Weekend Bash in a few weeks and you're all invited, provided you all bring something."

"I think Iason should bring the drinks," Raoul replied, quick as lightening.

The other Blondies laughed loudly at this, while Iason shook his head, smiling his amusement. He turned to look at Riki, who had made himself comfortable on the bar counter.

"Pet, get down from there. How many times must I tell you? And bring me my wine."

Riki scowled, jumping down from the counter with obvious annoyance. "Tai's getting it."

"But I want you to bring me mine."

For a moment Riki looked as though he would protest. He stood, one hand on his hip, meeting the Blondie's gaze with

defiance. Why was Iason acting in such a manner, after the afternoon they had just shared?

Iason watched him, curious to see what Riki would do. After a moment, the mongrel shrugged, running a hand through his unkempt hair. He retrieved a glass of wine and brought it to the Blondie, smirking.

“Here’s your wine, Master,” he said with exaggerated deference.

Heiku snickered at this, feeling strangely giddy, though Raoul was not amused.

“Are you going to let him get away with that?” Raoul demanded.

“Shut the fuck up, Raoul,” Riki snapped, without even thinking.

Of course, this was completely unacceptable. “Riki,” Iason scolded, taking the wine and putting it on the table beside his chair, then pulling his pet onto his lap. “You know better than to address a Blondie directly, and in such a manner.”

“But he’s being a dickhead,” Riki complained, though in a low voice.

Raoul flustered at this while the others tried, unsuccessfully, to hide their amusement at Riki’s appellation for the great Blondie.

“That’s enough. Now, apologize to Raoul, this instant.”

Riki scowled, struggling with a deep-seated urge to disobey Iason. He felt Iason’s grip get tighter on his arm--almost painfully so--as the Blondie made clear he would have his way on the issue.

“Riki,” Iason whispered in his ear, “don’t make me punish you. Do as I say. NOW.”

Sighing, Riki choked down his pride and turned toward Raoul, though he couldn’t bear to look at him. “I’m sorry for how I spoke to you,” he said, finally, his face flushing red.

“And how do you address a Blondie?” Iason prompted, tightening his grip.

“Sir Raoul,” Riki added, though with obvious bitterness.

Iason released his grip on his arm, setting him on his feet and giving him a smack on his rump. “Watch yourself, Riki.”

Raoul, though not completely satisfied with the sincerity of Riki’s apology, was nevertheless at least appeased that Iason had

forced the mongrel into submission. He nodded, almost dismissively, turning to Omaki.

“Is that your stomach, or mine?”

“Mine, I think,” the Blondie admitted. “I’m famished.”

“As am I,” Raoul replied.

The others voice their agreement.

“Dinner is ready,” Tai said.

This brought loud exclamations of approval.

“Very good,” Iason replied, sounding the dinner chime. The Blondies all headed toward the table, while the rest of the pets and Furniture came into the hall, looking around uncertainly.

“Where are we supposed to sit?” Ru whispered to Katze.

Katze frowned, shaking his head. “Master Iason?”

The Blondie glanced up and, suddenly realizing the situation, sighed. “It seems Tai wasn’t aware of our customs.” He gave Katze a pointed look, as though he were somehow at fault.

Katze raised his eyebrows, almost daring to challenge the Blondie--for he certainly had not been told it was his duty to inform Tai of anything--but he managed to hold his tongue.

Iason, however, caught his expression, giving him a sharp look. “Did you have something to say, Katze?” he demanded.

“No, Sir,” Katze purred, lowering his eyes, though he almost choked on the words.

“Very well. Let’s not waste time rearranging tables. Everyone sit down.”

And so, everyone sat together at the table, Blondies at one end and the pets and Furniture at the other. Commander Khosi returned to the hall, and took his place next to Iason, who sat at the head of the table.

Just as everyone was about to begin eating, Iason looked to the other end of the table, realizing the guest of honor was missing.

“Where’s Aki?”

Odi's Discovery

“Bloody hell,” Riki groaned, letting his forehead hit the empty plate before him. “Can we eat? I’m starved!”

Iason shot his pet a warning look, though Riki was too absorbed in his own discomfort to see it. “Riki, straighten up. We’ll not start without our guest of honor.”

“I’ll get him,” Omaki offered, and then, still sitting firmly in his chair, bellowed, “Aki!”

Startled by the sudden yelling, Yousi--who was very carefully sipping the expensive Aristian Red Emperor poured nearly to the brim of his glass--spilt his wine, nearly jumping out of his chair. Xian snorted, inhaling his cognac into his nose. Tai and Toma both came running to clean up the spilled wine, while Yousi apologized repeatedly, his face reddening from embarrassment.

“Don’t go to any trouble on our account, Omi,” Raoul remarked, wryly.

“Stop apologizing, Yousi,” Heiku whispered, putting a hand on his shoulder. “You didn’t do anything. Hear me? Yousi? Did you hear what I just said?”

“Yes, s-sorry,” Yousi stammered.

“I just told you to stop apologizing,” Heiku answered, then leaned over and whispered in his ear, “or do I need to discipline you?”

Yousi, calmed by Heiku’s teasing, smiled.

“Oh, all right. Usually he comes running.” Omaki sighed, pushing his chair back and rising slowly to his feet. He looked

toward Juthian, frowning. "Weren't you going to take them swimming?"

Juthian, surprised to be directly addressed by the great Blondie, stared back, eyes wide. "Yes, Sir...Lord Ghan...but they started...um...running around and I couldn't catch them, and then," now Juthian's gaze flitted toward his Master and he stopped, unsure how to finish.

"Ah yes," Xian continued, quickly. "I required Juthian for something...urgent."

"Something urgent being throwing him face down on the table?" Sarius whispered, causing snickers and stifled giggles from those around him.

"Sarius," Heiku scolded, sharply.

"Sorry, Master," Sarius murmured, hanging his head. It was not often he was reprimanded by his Master, and he was shamed by it, though all the Blondie had done was say his name.

A horrible thought suddenly occurred to Omaki--a terrible, frightening thought--and without another word he dashed from the great hall, running down the guest wing toward the pool area.

"Aki!" he yelled. "Answer me!"

But no answer was forthcoming and Omaki, now seized with panic, ran into the indoor garden, leaving the door wide open.

"Aki!" He looked into the pool, relieved to find it empty, then made for the outdoor garden, his hands trembling as he opened the door.

When he saw his precious Aki asleep by the fountain next to Suuki, who was also asleep, he nearly wept from relief. He crouched down, smiling at the way the two boys were tangled together, one leg sprawled over the other, capes intertwined, Aki's helmet and Suuki's makeshift saucepan helmet discarded some feet away next to an abandoned squirt gun. Aki was sucking his thumb, a habit the boy could not seem to break, and one that Omaki found especially endearing. For a long moment he simply watched the boys sleep, wishing he could gather up Aki and leave Amoi, taking him somewhere far from Jupiter's reach.

“Ah. You’ve found them.” Iason came up behind him, smiling at the boys, who seemed to be completely dead to the world.

“It must be the cider,” Omaki guessed. “They were pretty excited earlier.”

“Can you wake them?”

“Aki?” Omaki spoke the word gently, giving the boy a small shake. “Wake up, little love.”

“Mmmm?” Aki opened one eye, looking sleepy and confused.

“You’re missing your own party,” Omaki teased. “Or shall we give away the gifts to the guests?”

At this, Aki was wide awake, sitting up so abruptly that he woke Suuki, who looked so disoriented the Blondie had to smile.

“Don’t give away my presents,” Aki yelled.

“Hush, now,” Omaki scolded, reaching out to try and straighten the boy’s tussled hair. “I was only teasing you. But get up, everyone is waiting. It’s time for dinner.”

“Hooray! I’m starving!” Aki jumped to his feet, yanking Suuki’s arm impatiently. “Come on! We’re missing it!”

“Wah?” Suuki mumbled, without moving from his spot on the floor. He stared ahead into open space, feeling extremely tired and confused.

“Give him some time to wake up,” Omaki answered. “Stop pulling on his arm, Aki.”

Now Iason stepped forward, crouching down before the sleepy boy. “Would you like me to carry you, Suuki?” he asked, gently.

Nodding, Suuki reached out and cuddled up against the Blondie, letting his head rest against Iason’s chest. Iason rose and carried the boy easily.

“Where are your clothes, Aki?” Omaki demanded.

Aki froze as if struck by a profound thought, looked down at his feet, and then began robotically rotating in place, pivoting on one foot.

“Aki?”

“I’m thinking!” Aki replied.

“Well, where did you take them off?”

“I think I saw some clothes in the swimming area,” Iason remarked.

“Oh! We took them off to go swimming,” Aki remembered. “But then we never went. Because then Enyu started chasing me. He was naked, too.”

“I’m hungry,” Suuki whispered, one hand gripping Iason’s tunic while the other fondled the soft wispy strands of the Blondie’s hair.

“Dinner is on the table, we just need to get you dressed,” Iason answered, heading towards the indoor pool area.

“Your hair is pretty,” Suuki observed, his voice raspy from sleep.

“That is very kind of you to say.”

“My hair isn’t special,” the boy added, a little sadly.

“That’s quite untrue. You have the hair of an Elite, which is silver, and you should be proud of it.”

At this, Aki frowned, turning to look up at Iason. “Am I going to have Leet hair too?”

“Yes,” Iason replied. “You will have streaks of silver put into your hair, Aki. We will take care of that next week at the pet Academy.”

“The pet Academy?” Aki repeated, puzzled. “Why am I going there?”

Omaki looked toward Iason, a bit surprised at this announcement as well.

“The pet Academy is the only place that legally can modify hair,” Iason explained. “They’re quite good at it. I’m sure you’ll be very pleased.”

“Can Suuki come with me?” the boy asked, excited.

“If he has permission.”

“I want to go,” Suuki asserted.

“Ah. Here they are.” Omaki spied the boys’ clothing, which had been discarded by the pool. Iason put Suuki down and the boys both dressed quickly.

“I’m hungry,” Suuki whimpered.

“Me too!”

“I confess I could use a good meal,” Omaki remarked.

The party made their way back into the hall, their appearance greeted with cheers, applause and relief by the waiting guests who were all still sitting at the table, tortured by the sight and aromas of the food under the warming domes.

At this, Aki smiled shyly, pleased to be so cordially greeted.

“Woo hoo! Okay kid, sit down. Let’s eat!” Riki announced.

“Riki,” Iason scolded.

“What? I’m about to pass out from hunger!”

“Riki. You will keep quiet or I’ll have you go to your room, without dinner.”

Sighing dramatically, Riki then fell silent, not wanting to jeopardize his place at the table.

Aki and Suuki finally situated in their chairs, and Omaki and Iason having returned to their seats, everyone looked to Iason for permission to begin.

The Blondie looked at the table, nodding. “The food looks splendid. So. In honor of Sir Aki, the newest member of the House of Mink, I proclaim this dinner--”

“Master Iason, Lord Chi is here to see you,” Askel announced from the intercom.

Everyone groaned at this last minute interruption.

“Bloody hell,” Iason sighed.

The pets and Furniture all snickered at this, finding such mongrel-like vulgarities coming from the dignified Blondie highly comical. It was obvious to everyone where Iason had picked up this particular phrase.

Even Riki, who had been pouting after being reprimanded, had to smile.

“Shall I let him in?”

“Don’t let him borrow any sugar,” Xian commented, wryly.

Iason sighed. “Yes, yes. Send him in.”

The door hummed open and everyone turned to see Megala Chi, looking rather nervous, step into the foyer. “Oh dear,” he murmured. “I seem to have interrupted something.”

“It’s quite all right,” Iason replied, smoothly. “Come and join us, Megala.”

“Oh, I couldn’t possibly.”

“I insist.”

“But,” now Megala began noticing everyone at the table, marveling at the strange assemblage of Elite, pets and Furniture, “I really only wanted to speak to you in private, Iason, if that might be possible.”

“Megala! Get your ass over here!” Omaki called out.

“Yes, we’re just beginning, I insist you join us, and I won’t take no for an answer,” Iason repeated, successfully concealing his irritation with his perfectly cordial manner. It was just like Megala to make a big production out of a simple thing like accepting a dinner invitation. “Come, come. I’ll not have you standing there in the foyer. Toma, bring Megala a chair. Tai. Bring him some wine--Icarian Amber.”

“Yes, Master,” Toma and Tai murmured in harmony, rushing to retrieve the wanted items.

“Well, I suppose,” Megala’s gaze drifted now to the warming domes that crowded the banquet table, his stomach growling from the incredible aromas emanating from the room, “that is, I don’t mean to be any trouble....”

“Here. Sit next to Raoul,” Xian teased, with a mischievous grin. Heiku snickered at this, and Raoul flushed red.

Commander Khosi, who had been observing the Blondies quietly, now found his attention focused on Megala Chi, who still stood uncertainly in the foyer. He eyed the Blondie with unveiled admiration, immediately deciding Megala was next on his list of seduction.

He smiled, scooting his chair a bit closer to Iason’s. “Sit next to me.”

Megala blinked, not quite sure how to respond to the invitation from the handsome, dark-haired stranger.

“Megala, this is Commander Voshka Khosi of Alpha Zen,” Iason clarified, feeling a bit annoyed that Megala had made no

further progress toward the table. "Commander, Lord Megala of the House of Chi."

"A pleasure," Voshka purred, smiling.

Megala, completely unaccustomed to having anyone flirt with him openly, was further awed by the presence of the legendary Commander Khosi and continued to stand, motionless, as though already paralyzed by Voshka's seductive arts.

"That's it," Omaki announced, throwing his napkin down with obvious exasperation. He stood up, strode over to Megala, and proceeded to push him rather roughly towards the table. "Sit your ass down, we're all starving." Omaki forced him to sit down in the chair Toma had placed next to the Commander, then returned to his seat.

"Your wine, Lord Chi." Tai held the wine glass out to the surprised Blondie, who had not expected Iason to remember that Icarian Amber was his favorite. It had been years since he had been to the Mink household for any sort of function, and if the truth were told, Megala had begun to feel a bit slighted, though he suspected that he had been dropped from Iason's invitation lists because of his jealousy over Raoul, years before. He had been, admittedly, a bit cold toward Iason--more than once--and he felt a little ashamed of it, now that the Blondie had invited him to join what appeared to be a very special, intimate party.

"Can we start?" Aki pleaded.

"Yes, yes," Iason replied, raising a glass. "After we toast you, Aki."

"To Aki!" The guests all raised their glasses in unison, and thus, dinner finally commenced, everyone talking at once as the warming domes were raised and the food, at last, piled onto the plates. The slow-roasted Aristian pheasant, dripping with its own juices, was so tender that the meat slid from the bones, and all the side dishes were equally succulent, having been prepared with Tai's incomparable artistry at all things cuisine.

"Yummy!" Aki squealed, voicing with delightful economy the precise sentiments of everyone there, for the Tarnacsian cider had

given them all insatiable appetites that made the culinary fare especially tempting.

“What is the...err...special occasion?” Megala asked.

“This is Aki’s Guardianship party.” Iason helped himself to a generous portion of roasted pheasant and mashed potatoes, spooning a liberal helping of the gravy onto both. This was unusual for the Blondie, who typically consumed surprisingly light meals relative to his immense size--sometimes even forgoing dinner altogether. But even Iason was famished this evening, and Tai had truly outdone himself.

The feast before them was truly a work of art, the dishes laid out in a breathtaking spread amidst the elegant, white rounded vases of now fully-blown red and yellow Amoian roses. The antiquarian lit candles bathed the entire table in an ethereal glow enhanced by the light of the twin moons Ios and Erphanes, which at that moment shone, waxing soft, in the clear winter sky through Iason’s tall arching windows. The delectable aromas that emanated from the banquet’s offerings, in concert with the visual seduction of the meal, worked to effect an additional intoxication on the cider-weary guests, who were now enjoying one final pleasure--perfectly prepared cuisine.

Megala looked puzzled. “Guardianship?”

“Iason’s going to be Aki’s Guardian,” Omaki clarified.

“But I thought Aki was,” Megala started, then stopped, confused. “I heard he was from your house.” He leaned forward, lowering his voice. “I thought he was your pet.”

“Aki is far too young to be a pet. He is Unclassified,” Iason cut in, smoothly, “and I will be his Guardian until he comes of age.”

Megala blinked at this. “I didn’t know there was such a thing.”

“It’s in the General Code,” Iason replied, almost dismissively.

“Ah. The General Code,” Heiku repeated, with an air of Elitish snobbery, imitating the stern voice of Headmaster Konami, who had run the Academy when he, Yousi, Raoul, Iason, Xian, Omaki, Megala Chi and their peers had attended, not yet fourscore years

before. “Now that makes for a stimulating read, wouldn’t you say so, Yousi?”

“It is too boring to read,” Yousi replied, honestly, not picking up on the Blondie’s joke.

The Elites all laughed at this.

“My thoughts precisely,” Xian agreed. “Yousi, you are like a breath fresh air.”

Heiku shook his head, shuddering. “Remember when Headmaster Konami made us memorize entire sections of the Code?”

Raoul groaned. “Please don’t remind me. I thought I would be the first Blondie to be kicked out of the Academy,” he confessed.

“I thought you would be, too,” Omaki shot back, “only for a different reason.” He grinned, winking at Iason.

Iason ignored this remark, though he glanced at Raoul, who smiled back at him, eyes shining. “Tai. This roast is outstanding.”

“Everything is outstanding,” Raoul clarified, eliciting nods of approval and murmurs of general assent.

Tai gave a small bow from his chair, beaming. “Thank you, Master Iason.”

“Yes, I am very pleased, Tai. You have done so well, I will overlook, this once, the incident with the Tarnacsian cider.”

“Here here!” Heiku began tapping his crystal glass with his fork, and was joined by everyone else at the table, the tinkling crystal creating a symphony of approbation that was considered the highest form of praise in Amoian society.

“I say Tarnacsian punch ought to be a REQUIREMENT for any truly great party, from here on out,” Omaki announced.

“I concur!” Heiku grinned, giving Yousi a pointed look. “Right, Yousi?”

“Yes, we ought to have punch, otherwise people will get thirsty,” Yousi observed, not quite getting the point.

Tai, having earned his clemency, finally relaxed in his chair, basking in the glory of the moment. He dared meet Odi’s gaze,

finding his lover watching him with proud eyes, a small smile twisting his lips.

From that point on, the dinner was transformed into an event, so great was the merriment and laughter of all the guests. The conversation was loud and furious, everyone talking at once, though the table remained divided into two separate circles of intercourse, the Elites, occupying the head of the table, with Iason Mink at the high seat, and the non-Elites, who all conversed among themselves.

“So, Commander,” Heiku began, arching a brow, “what did you think of Omi here? Was he acceptable under the sheets?”

“I beg your pardon,” Omaki protested, feigning offense. “Such private matters are hardly appropriate dinner conversation.”

“Quite delightful,” Voshka replied, winking at Omaki. “Almost as good as Iason.”

“What!” Heiku exclaimed, amidst shocked gasps from the other Blondies.

“Almost?” Omaki repeated, pretending to pout.

Iason stiffened, looking decidedly embarrassed. “Vosh,” he whispered.

Raoul frowned at this, now eyeing the Commander with renewed interest, and not a little jealousy.

Yui, who was now rather uncomfortable from his punishment at Raoul’s hand and therefore feeling a bit distracted, happened at that moment to turn away from the conversation at his end of the table, catching his Master’s dark look. He watched as Raoul leaned over to whisper something in Iason’s ear and felt his stomach clench.

“Is everything all right, Yui?” Daryl asked. “You look a bit upset.”

Katze, catching the direction of Yui’s gaze, shook his head. “You’re going to have to get used to that, Yui. Those two go way back.”

“I know,” Yui whispered. “That doesn’t make it hurt any less.”

“You should consider yourself lucky, with your restoration and all. Frankly, I’m surprised Raoul had it done. He must think a great deal of you.”

Yui was silent, his gaze now moving to his Master’s new pet, who was chatting happily with the other pets at the very end of the table.

“No need for jealousy there, either,” Katze remarked. “He’s only a pet, Yui.”

“What are you talking about?” Riki demanded.

“Relax. We’re not talking about you,” Katze answered.

“Hmm.” Riki pouted. Spying Raoul leaning close to whisper in Iason’s ear, he frowned. “Dickhead,” he muttered.

“Hush,” Katze warned.

“Relax. I wasn’t talking about you,” Riki quipped.

“I know who you were talking about. And you’d better watch yourself, Riki. Iason won’t tolerate your insulting Raoul again.”

“But he is a dickhead.”

Now Yui’s eyes flashed angrily. “Don’t speak about my Master that way.”

“Still starting fights, Riki?” Enyu taunted. “I would have thought by now Iason would have beaten that out of you.”

Riki turned to Enyu. “Don’t start with me, catboy! I’ll stick your tail up your ass and make you rut backwards!”

Sarius laughed loudly at this. “How does one rut backwards, exactly?”

Now Katze put a hand on Riki’s shoulder, leaning close. “Riki. I’m serious. Calm down.”

“Is there a problem, Katze?” Iason’s voice rose above the din, and everyone immediately hushed.

“Hopefully not. Right, Riki?” Katze replied, nudging Riki with his foot.

Frowning, Riki struggled with his emotions, suddenly feeling exceedingly grumpy and irritable. He resented having to play the part of Iason’s pet when they had shared so much intimacy behind closed doors. He thought of Iason as his lover, not his Master, but

the Blondie obviously intended to demonstrate to everyone there that he had complete authority over him. It seemed to him extraordinarily unfair; he'd hated Iason's manner toward him, especially when he had submitted to the humiliation of wearing his chains especially to please him earlier that day. He had expected Iason to reciprocate by showing him special regard, and when the Blondie, instead, seemed even more distant and demanding, he felt betrayed.

"Pet. Come here."

"I'm eating," Riki whined, picking up his fork to demonstrate.

"Did you hear me? I told you to come here."

All eyes were on Riki now, who continued to sit.

"Riki!"

"Why are you being such a prick?" the mongrel finally demanded, eliciting shocked gasps from all the guests.

Katze sighed, removing his hand from Riki's shoulder. "Real smart, Riki."

Iason stood up, the look on his face leaving no question as to his mood; in fact, he was furious. Riki certainly knew better than to challenge him in the presence of Elite guests, and he was mortified that he had done so, especially since he had been particularly hoping to show him off. Riki's hard-won obedience would have been a great boast to his authority, and thus his reputation, and Iason had mistakenly thought he had already achieved it. He slid the taming stick from its sheath. "Stand up, Riki," he whispered.

"Oh, all right." Exasperated, Riki rose to his feet, finally turning to look at him. "What do you want?" His gaze lowered to the taming stick, and he visibly flinched, genuinely surprised that Iason intended to punish him in the presence of his guests.

"If you think you can escape punishment now, pet, you're sadly mistaken," the Blondie replied, walking toward him menacingly.

"Please Guardian," Aki pleaded, eyeing the taming stick with horror. "Don't punish him. Can you do it some other time? He'll be naughty again tomorrow. You can punish him then."

The guests all laughed at this, relieving the tension that had been building in the room.

Iason softened at Aki's request, returning his taming stick to its sheath. "Very well, since you have asked for it, Aki. This is your party, and it shouldn't be spoiled by a naughty little pet." As Iason spoke these last words he took hold of Riki's arm, gripping him with punishing force.

"Hooray!" Aki exclaimed.

The Blondie leaned down to whisper softly in Riki's ear. "Defy me one more time and I'll put you in the T-stand, pet."

Riki scowled at this, wincing from the Blondie's firm grip. Though he cared little for this threat, was thrilled to have avoided certain punishment. He sat down, shooting Aki a grateful smile once Iason had returned to his chair and the dinner had resumed.

The conversation started back up again, everyone resuming their previous merriment as though nothing had happened.

"You lucky bastard," Katze remarked, shaking his head. "I'm seriously worried about your ability to think straight. Were you dropped on your head, by any chance, as a child?"

Riki ignored this, turning to Aki.

"Hey kid. You're pretty cool."

"Aki," the boy corrected, smiling back.

"Sorry. I'm Riki."

"I know."

"Everyone knows you," Suuki added, with a giggle.

"Hmm," Riki replied, raising an eyebrow.

"How did you do that? With your...little thingie?" Aki asked, pointing to his eyebrow.

Riki shrugged. "Dunno."

"Am I doing it?" Aki raised and lowered both eyebrows together, his eyes widening comically as he did so.

"No," the mongrel replied, smiling at the boy's attempt. "You look pretty cute though."

"Am I?" Suuki demanded.

The boy furrowed his brow in an odd way that made him look extraordinarily perplexed.

Riki laughed out loud. "No, you just look confused."

"Why did you do that, Riki? Insult your Master like that?" Sarius asked.

"You wouldn't understand," Riki replied, sighing.

"Riki, you can't speak that way to a Blondie," Daryl whispered, nervously. "You're lucky he didn't tame you, even if it IS Aki's party."

Katze nodded. "You deserved it too, I might add."

"Yeah, Riki," Enyu chimed in. "You're naughty as ever, I see."

"And you're as weird as ever," Riki shot back. "At least I don't orgasm in concert with the moon, you freak."

"There is nothing wrong with having an interval," Enyu replied, looking indignant. "And my Master likes it."

"Yeah, well, everyone knows your Master is as perverted as they get."

"Hold on there, Riki," Ru protested. "Master Omaki is a great Blondie, you ought to show some respect."

"Hmm. I have no respect for ANY Blondie, although the one with the bionic arm is rather cool."

"That's my Master," Sarius beamed, proudly.

"How can you not respect the Blondies, Riki?" Juthian asked.

"Because he's a mongrel," Katze answered. "He has no respect for anything or anyone, not even himself."

"I object to that portrayal," Riki replied, his mouth half full of food. "I respect myself."

"Riki," Katze scolded. "Try not talking when you have food in your mouth."

Enyu wrinkled his nose in disgust. "How vulgar."

In response to this, Riki opened his mouth, gifting the Xeronian with a most unappetizing view of his half-chewed food.

"Riki!" Daryl protested, disgusted. "Show some manners!"

"He doesn't have any, apparently," Enyu remarked.

“Nope,” Riki agreed. “I’m vulgar and uncouth, and Iason likes me that way.”

“I don’t know about that, Riki,” Katze argued. “I’m sure he would prefer if you were at least civilized.”

“To be civilized implies one belongs to a civilization, and I do not,” the mongrel retorted.

“Yes, you do, Riki,” Daryl pressed. “You may have been a non-citizen before, but now you’re Iason’s pet, so you’re part of Amoian society.”

“I’ll never be part of it, and I don’t WANT to be part of it.”

“Sure you do,” Katze argued. “There’s nothing left for you in Ceres and you know it.”

Riki fell silent at this, trying to hide how affected he was by Katze’s remark by stirring his corn in with his mashed potatoes as though this were a project requiring significant mental resources.

He was feeling decidedly ambivalent of late, half inclined to give into Iason’s demands and yet part of him instinctively rebelling--perhaps for one last time--so that he was at the same time moving toward and away from the Blondie, from Eos, from all that he was and all that he was becoming so that he no longer knew his own identity, or where he truly belonged. He hid his internal crisis by putting on an air of disdain, by pretending to be the mongrel he knew he would never be again, by being deliberately rude, vulgar, and shocking.

In truth, Riki was an intelligent young man who had now outgrown his mongrel skins but was simply unable to abandon them, and so forced himself into an unflattering likeness of his former self to conceal the man he was becoming.

“You ought to have punished him anyway,” Raoul remarked, as Iason returned to his seat.

“I am not surprised that is your view,” Iason sighed.

“You show him too much leniency. You know I’m right.”

“Oh come on, Raoul,” Heiku protested. “We all know you just wanted to see him be punished.”

“He deserved to be punished.”

“I daresay he’ll be punished again, soon enough,” Omaki remarked.

“So, what is it you wanted to talk to me about, Megala?” Iason asked, turning to the Blondie who was listening to this conversation with great interest.

“Oh! I would rather talk to you in private,” he murmured.

“Very well. Although I should tell you, these are my most intimate friends, and I would most likely tell them anyway.”

“I see,” Megala frowned, feeling decidedly uneasy. He knew his confession was not going to be taken well, and particularly because Raoul was at the table, he now dreaded what he knew he had to do.

“Aw Iason. Your most intimate friends? I’m touched,” Omaki said.

“We all know you’re a bit touched. In the head, Omaki,” Xian quipped.

“Am I one of your most intimate friends, too?” Voshka asked, with a teasing smile.

Omaki raised an eyebrow. “That depends on how you define intimacy.”

“So, Commander, when exactly did you two fuck?” Heiku demanded.

“About a half an hour after I first arrived,” Voshka replied, without missing a beat.

“Vosh!” Now Iason was clearly angry, his face flushing dark.

Omaki leaned toward Heiku. “He calls him Vosh.”

The Commander laughed. “Oh come now, Iason. I was not the only one who enjoyed it.”

Raoul, seething with jealousy, stabbed at his winter sprouts, sending one flying onto Yousi’s plate.

“Did you want this back?” Yousi asked, picking up the errant sprout.

“Uh oh. Raoul’s in one of his moods,” Xian murmured.

Voshka, observing Raoul’s reaction, smiled. “Ah. I see.” Then, turning to Iason, he whispered in a low voice, “I seem to have intruded again.”

“I’m sure I don’t know what you mean,” Iason replied, his face an impassive mask.

“I think you do.”

“As I was saying, Megala,” Iason continued, trying to divert the conversation from its current course, “you might as well say what you’ve come to say.”

Megala, who was observing the dynamics between Raoul, Iason and Voshka with transparent jealousy, cleared his throat.

Heiku groaned. “You’re not going to start doing that again, are you?”

“Do what?” Megala protested, puzzled.

“That thing you do! With your...throat!”

“I didn’t know I did a thing,” the Blondie confessed, looking a bit mystified.

“You do,” Xian nodded. “It used to drive me crazy back at the Academy.”

Horried, Megala looked from one Blondie to the next. “Why didn’t someone tell me?”

“We figured you knew,” Omaki replied.

Heiku frowned. “How could you NOT know?”

Megala, feeling exceptionally nervous over this new information, instinctively cleared his throat again, eliciting groans from the Blondies.

“Sorry,” he whispered, blushing.

Now the Commander, who had been watching poor Megala’s reactions to the revelation of a bad habit he hadn’t even known he’d possessed, took pity on the Blondie. He leaned over, resting a hand on Megala’s back to toy with his hair while he whispered seductively in his ear, “Perhaps you can show me what other things you can do with your throat?”

Megala was so surprised by this that he cleared his throat again.

Heiku dropped his fork, irritated. “Megala!”

“I can’t help it!” Megala cried.

Now the surgeon held up his bionic hand, rotating his middle two fingers. "Do it one more time and I'll stick these down your throat and rip out your larynx."

"No, Heiku," Yousi whispered, distressed over this threat and unable to comprehend that the Blondie wasn't serious.

Heiku turned and gave Yousi a wink. "Relax, love. I was only teasing."

"I'll...I'll try to stop," Megala stammered, "but I didn't even know I was doing it."

"So," Iason continued, "what is it you wanted to talk to me about?"

"Well...I have...a confession to make. It's rather embarrassing actually."

The Blondies immediately quieted at this, turning to look at Megala with interest, except Raoul, who continued to brood as he ate.

"If it's about Raoul, we already know," Omaki teased.

"Yes, well," Megala's face flushed red as he stared down at his plate, "I suppose it does have something to do with Raoul."

Surprised, Raoul stopped eating and turned to look at Megala.

"That is, when I built this tower," now Megala glanced at Iason, who was studying him with an inexplicable expression, "I might have built...certain...um...secret things. That is, secret passages."

Iason furrowed his brow at this. "What do you mean? You mean beyond what you've told me about?"

Megala nodded, looking a bit ashamed. "Yes. Quite a few, actually."

"What does this have to do with me?" Raoul demanded.

Megala took a deep breath, closing his eyes. He hated having to confess his perversions, especially to Raoul, but with the blueprints stolen, he knew it was critical, for security reasons, to finally tell them the truth. "I built passageways throughout the tower so I could...see what was going on. So I could...see into your room."

"What!" Raoul stood up, furious.

“I stopped watching you years ago!” Megala added, frightened by Raoul’s dark look.

“So you DID watch me!”

“I couldn’t help it!”

“Of course you could help it,” Iason snapped. “Do you mean to say you’ve been spying on me as well?”

“Oh no,” Megala protested. “That is, well yes, maybe years ago, but I haven’t--honestly I haven’t--not for a long, long time!”

Raoul threw his napkin down. “This is unconscionable!”

“I know!” Megala replied, almost whimpering.

“Did Jupiter know about these passageways?” Iason asked.

“No! That’s the thing! The...problem!”

“I don’t know what you’re saying.”

“The blueprints! They’ve been stolen!”

The entire table had now hushed, all eyes focused on the scene unfolding at the head of the table.

“What’s this?” Odi asked, frowning. “What did he just tell you? About the stolen blueprints?”

“Megala built secret passageways into the tower to spy on Raoul and Iason,” Heiku answered.

“You had NO RIGHT,” Raoul began, so angry he could hardly see straight. “I should tear you limb from limb!”

“I know! I know I had no right! I was young and...well...I was in love with you. I only wanted to watch you. I knew I couldn’t have you. But I was just torturing myself. I finally stopped, I swear!”

Now Anders, who had been standing silently near the wall during the entire dinner, stepped forward, looking decidedly alarmed.

“Are you saying there is a secret passageway leading to this suite?”

Megala sighed, nodding. “Yes, yes.”

Ayuda, who had also been standing guard, exchanged looks with Odi. “This is serious.”

“Agreed,” Odi replied, standing up.

“It wouldn’t have been a problem,” Megala protested, “if they hadn’t been stolen.”

“But who would know to steal them? Who knew you had built these secret passages?”

“No one!”

“Someone must have!”

“Everyone, please. Remember this is Aki’s party,” Iason soothed. “Raoul. Sit down.”

“How can you be so calm about this? Don’t you realize--all the those times--when we thought we were alone,” Raoul began.

“Hush,” Iason whispered. “Let’s talk about this later.”

Aki and Suuki, not quite understanding why the Blondies were so angry, had both gleaned the one thing that was of any real consequence to nine-year-old boys: the tower was full of secret passages. The boys looked at each other, grinning.

“There are secret passageways,” Aki whispered, excited.

“Yes, Raoul, do sit down, you’re spoiling the mood,” Heiku scolded.

Exasperated, Raoul sat down, sighing loudly.

“Commander, I strongly recommend we leave the tower immediately,” Anders whispered.

Voshka waved his guard away. “No, no. Don’t be absurd. We’re in the middle of a delightful dinner.”

“But Commander--”

“You have my answer,” Voshka replied, sharply.

“I must agree with him, Commander,” Ayuda announced. “This is a serious security breach. We should act immediately.”

Odi nodded. “Agreed.”

“Surely we can at least finish dinner?” Iason replied, sighing. “What is the probability that something is going to happen before we have a chance to finish dessert?”

Odi frowned. “Well I can’t give you the exact probability, but since the blueprints were stolen, the risk is elevated, so--”

“Odi, sit down.”

“Please, you asked me to be Head of Security. I can’t protect you if you don’t let me do my job. At least let me investigate these...passages.”

“You may do so, after dinner. Sit down.”

The bodyguard looked as though he were about to challenge Iason again, but upon seeing the Blondie’s firm look, he gave up, nervously returning to his chair.

“Commander--”

“Yes, Anders, I am your Commander. And I command you to return to your post and let us enjoy our dinner.”

Gritting his teeth with annoyance, Anders stepped back, though now he was extremely vigilant, looking around the penthouse anxiously.

“Iason, I think--”

“Ayuda, we’ll discuss this after dinner.”

Ayuda sighed, forced to retreat to the wall next to Anders. The two bodyguards exchanged looks, a quiet understanding passing between them as they watched over those in the hall, both of them now in a state of heightened awareness.

Ayuda took out his communicator, flipping it to text mode, and immediately began messaging Odi, to determine the increased security measures would need to be taken that evening. Odi quietly operated his communicator under the table with one hand, deftly organizing a strategy even as he appeared to be eating dinner. Tai watched him, worried. He could tell by Odi’s tight jaw that he was upset, and he could not help but admire the way the bodyguard managed to attend to his duties, even defying Iason’s orders, in order to protect the Blondie and his important guest.

“So Megala,” Heiku began, trying to restore a sense of the former merriment to the party, “what exactly did you do when you spied on Iason and Raoul?”

“Do you really have to ask?” Omaki quipped.

Megala blushed again, but said nothing.

“Tell me Megala, did you build anything in MY tower I should know about?”

Megala shook his head. “No. You know everything. And you watched me build it.”

“Yes, I did,” Omaki replied, feeling pleased with himself. In truth, ever since Megala had confessed to him, on the one night they had shared together, that he had built secret passageways in the Eos Tower, he had never quite trusted the Blondie. So, when he commissioned him to build the Taming Tower, he had been very interested in the blueprints and the construction, personally inspecting every single space that was erected, and sometimes even halting construction to take measurements, wanting to be sure everything added up.

“What about my Suites?” Heiku asked, frowning. It had never occurred to him to wonder if there were any secret areas in the Denovian Royal Suites, but now that the issue was on the table, he realized that the existence of such passageways would pose a tremendous risk to his enterprise. The Suites housed ambassadors from the entire Quadrant, VIPs who chose Heiku’s Suites when visiting Amoi not only for their luxury but for their security.

“No, no. I promise,” Megala smiled. “Yours was the first commission I received, after the Emporium. Everything was exactly as shown in the prints.”

“If you’re lying to me, I’ll be forced to rip your heart out,” Heiku threatened, wiggling his robotic fingers menacingly.

Megala shuddered at this, not quite sure if the Blondie was serious, but not doubting that he was capable of it; he now had two threats to his bodily organs, noting with distress that Heiku had used the phrase “rip out” with regard to both.

At the other end of the table, the non-Elites were whispering among themselves.

“What are they talking about?” Ru asked, confused.

“Lord Chi built secret passageways into the Eos tower,” Sarius reported, having listened closely to all the details. “So he could watch Iason and Raoul together.”

“What!” Toma exclaimed.

Katze nodded. "It's true. Actually there is at least one passageway I know about, besides the stairway to the Observatory."

"Where is it?" Riki demanded. "How come I don't know about it?"

"Take a wild guess, genius," Katze shot back.

"You mean you knew there was a secret passage and you kept it from me?"

"Calm down. It wouldn't really matter if you knew, your pet ring would restrict you from leaving the penthouse. And even if you could leave, where would you go? Iason would find you. The ring has a tracer."

"Then why hide it from me?"

Toma and Katze exchanged looks. "Because...in all honesty, there is one way you could get out." Now Katze's gaze moved to Riki's groin. He raised a brow.

"What are you saying, that I'd castrate myself just to escape?" Riki laughed. "Only a complete idiot would cut off his own dick."

"Hmm."

"No offense," Riki added, grinning.

Katze smiled. "None taken."

"So Riki, are you saying freedom isn't worth as much as your sexuality?" Daryl asked, curious.

The mongrel thought for a moment. "If it was, I'd have done it the first day Iason dragged me here. Why would I wait two bloody years and be punished practically every other day and THEN do something like that?"

Katze nodded. "Good point."

Aki, who had been listening to this conversation quietly while loudly crunching on ice from his Gardanian cowberry tea, now looked directly at Katze. "Can you show me the secret passages?"

"I know only of one. Besides the Observatory, I mean."

"But can you show me?"

Katze shrugged. "I suppose there's no harm in it now. Looks like we're all going to find out pretty soon. Although don't get too excited--Iason will probably have them all sealed off."

Aki, who couldn't imagine any purpose for a secret passage beyond providing an exciting new forum for his playtime adventures--and given the complete absence of any sort of penthouse slides to compensate for his having left the Taming Tower--was horrified.

"Why is he going to do that!" he yelled.

"Hey Aki. If you and I are going to get along, you're going to have to stop yelling all the time," Riki muttered.

"Oh, that's rich, Riki. You telling him not to yell," Katze teased.

"Sorry," Aki mumbled.

"Aki, did you get your Greeting from Jupiter?" Juthian asked, smiling gently at the boy.

"Yes! She told me I was special," he replied, proudly.

"Did she now? What did she say?"

Aki puzzled over this for a moment. "I can't remember exactly. Except that I'm going to be a Leet."

"She said he has special status. He's Unclassified," Ru clarified. "He's even got a unique number: U-004M. She told him he was Iason's ward until he matriculates and that he would be going to the Elite Academy."

"She said I could go to the Amoian Guard Academy," Aki remembered, brightening. "When I'm twelve."

Ru nodded. "She did say that."

"Wow, Aki. You should be very proud." Juthian smiled at the boy. "Jupiter doesn't hand out special status that often. Actually I've never even heard of anyone receiving it."

Sarius shook his head. "I haven't either."

Aki beamed at this.

"I'm not special," Suuki observed, a little sadly.

"Of course you are, don't be absurd," Katze replied. "You're an Elite. It doesn't get any better than that."

"Unless you're a Blondie," Daryl added. "Then you're the Elite of the Elites."

"Why don't you think you're special, Suuki?" Juthian pressed, gently.

The boy sighed. "I just know it, somehow."

"Geez, get the kid some therapy," Riki remarked.

"You're special," Aki asserted. "And plus you're my best friend."

Suuki brightened at this. "I am?"

"Yes! And we're going to Alpha Zen together, remember?"

Juthian laughed at this. "Why are you going to Alpha Zen?"

"We're going to do our Aprentage Ships with Commander Khosi."

"Your what?"

"Our Aprentage Ships!"

"I think he means apprenticeships," Kahlan whispered.

"Ah, I see. You're going to be training under Commander Khosi, then," Juthian said with feigned reverence.

Aki nodded and the others all smiled at this, not realizing that the boys had truly been given invitations by the famous Commander.

"Speaking of the Commander, he sure is a good-looking fellow," Sarius remarked. "Not at all what I was expecting."

"Yes. Wouldn't you agree, Riki?" Katze asked, with a small smile.

Riki replied to this by flipping him off.

"Yes, he's very good looking," Enyu confirmed.

"So what exactly were you and your Master doing in Iason's bedroom with the Commander?" Sarius pressed.

The Xeronian smiled, his eyes dilating slightly. "I am not at liberty to say."

"Whore," Riki whispered, under his breath.

"What was that?"

Katze laughed. "Yeah, Riki, you should talk."

"Are we ready for dessert, I wonder?" Tai asked, rising.

"What's for dessert?" Aki cried, excited.

"It's an Aristian Triple Chocolate Cake."

"Triple Chocolate!"

Tai nodded.

“Ah, Tai. Yes. I was about to call for dessert,” Iason said.
“Please bring coffee, as well.”

“Yes, Master. Let me just clear the table.”

“I’ll help,” Ru added, rising to his feet.

“I can help,” Kahlan announced, standing.

“Me too,” Daryl said, but he was immediately stayed by Katze, who pushed him back into his chair.

“You’ll sit. I’ll help.”

Juthian, Yui and Toma stood up as well.

“Sarius,” Heiku hinted, in a low voice.

“Oh. Sorry, Master,” Sarius replied, standing up, though he had been hoping to get out of kitchen duty for once. Clearing the table was his least favorite responsibility. “I’ll help too, I guess.”

Thus the table was cleared very quickly and the dessert brought in, which was consumed with great relish by all the guests, after which Aki’s presents were brought to the table, much to the boy’s obvious delight.

Aki had never opened so many presents, and seemed equally excited by each gift--an electronic slate for school, equipped with holographic projection, several beautiful Elite shoulder wing pins for his clothing, shiny new white Elite boots, games and mind puzzles, a set of books on Ancient Amoian History during the Age of Vendel and the Dark Kings of Zahtu, a subscription to Tanagura Quarterly, a holographic museum projection (Iason’s gifts), a picture book of all known creatures from the Galaxy, classified and indexed according to genetic code, a transient room bubble generator, a set of holographic full-length adventure movies from Xeron (Xian’s gifts), a metal box of writing implements and various calculators, a Gardanian 12-day room creature (just add water), a locked thought-book (Raoul’s gifts), cherry drop candy from Yurenia, a medical encyclopedia, a collection of rocks and stones from the Fourth Quadrant (Heiku’s gifts), a kaleidoscope, kites from Aristia, a floating sphere lamp, emergency odor removal spray (Yousi’s gifts), a lifetime passcard to the Eos Tower Theatre

Complex, a hover board, an Aristian flute, and a state of the art independent handheld flip-phone communicator (Omaki's gifts).

One final gift remained, a joint gift from Omaki and Iason. As soon as Aki opened it, a small, palm-sized sphere lifted out of the box with a quiet hum, hovering and spinning before Aki's face.

"Ohhh," Aki exclaimed, not exactly sure what it was.

The device immediately scanned Aki's retina, and then a series of lights flashed along its side. It then turned to Suuki, scanning him, and continued around the room, identifying everyone there.

"What is it?" he asked, thrilled.

"It's an X900 Guardian, from Xeron," Iason replied. "Think of it as your security guard, Aki."

"It will protect you, wherever you go. No one will be able to touch you, without your permission," Omaki added.

"What happens if someone touches me?" Aki asked, eagerly.

"Riki. Try grabbing Aki's arm."

Shrugging, Riki reached out to touch Aki, but as soon as he made contact, the Guardian whirled around and sped across the room, flashing red. "Move away from the boy. You have 3 seconds to comply."

Riki grinned, holding up his hands. "I surrender."

"Fascinating," Odi whispered, the first comment he had made all dinner.

"Yes, it's state of the art technology. Quite expensive, I might add."

"Where did you get it?" Voshka asked, intrigued.

"Katze found it for me on the Market. There are only five in existence."

"How much did it cost you?" Heiku asked.

"Five million credits."

Everyone gasped at this sum.

Even Raoul was surprised. "You paid five million?"

"Omaki and I each paid one and a half. I asked Jupiter for the remaining two million."

"And Jupiter gave it to you?"

Iason nodded.

“You hear that, Aki?” Juthian whispered. “Jupiter must think a lot of you.”

“It was necessary,” Iason continued. “As my ward, he requires additional protection.”

Omaki nodded. They had both agreed the device was essential for Aki’s security. His connection with Iason made him a target--not merely for Elite bullies at the Academy but from those who might try and use Aki to get to Iason. The device also recorded Aki’s every move, so that both Iason and Omaki could monitor his activities, though they both refrained from mentioning this.

“What would it have done, if Riki had tried to harm him?” Heiku asked.

“It would have paralyzed him temporarily with a stun laser, and then set off a loud alarm, alerting the nearest Security post as well as Omaki and myself.”

“Gee thanks,” Riki muttered.

“Brilliant,” Voshka remarked, nodding. “Only five in existence, you say?”

“Yes. The other four belong to various royalty and dignitaries on Xeron, Gardan, and Yurenia.”

“I must say,” Xian sighed, pushing back from the table, “this was one of the best dinner parties I’ve ever been to. If not the very best.”

The others nodded their agreement.

“What’s next on the agenda?” Heiku asked.

“I think we should retire to the Observatory for a few drinks,” Iason replied. “And all of you are welcome to stay the night.”

Xian smiled. “Can we use that hot tub of yours?”

“Of course. You may select any of the available suites on the guest wing and you are welcome to the pools, as well.”

“Are you sure you have enough rooms for all of us?” Heiku asked, having never spent the night in Iason’s penthouse.

“Yes, after Aki picks out his suite, there will be two suites left in the guest wing, and there are twenty empty rooms in the east wing,

although those are not suites. They're quite spacious though, and they do have a seating area, but no private baths."

"A butterfly!" Aki exclaimed, as a bright green and blue butterfly fluttered down onto one of the yellow roses on the table.

"Oh dear," Omaki mumbled. "I might have let those out."

"We'll catch them," Aki offered.

Suuki nodded. "We can do it."

Iason smiled. "Thank you, boys. But be very careful--try not to touch their wings. They're actually quite rare."

"We'll be careful!" Aki gently captured the fugitive butterfly in his hands, and then he and Suuki took off to return it to the pool sanctuary and search for the others.

"As for myself, I accept your invitation to stay the night, Iason," Heiku announced. "Mostly because I feel far too lazy to drive back home. And I claim a suite."

"I accept as well," Raoul confirmed. "And I'll take a suite."

"Damn!" Xian cursed. "I'm staying, though. Even though I wasn't fast enough to claim a suite."

Omaki grinned. "Now that it's a party, I'll be staying. Aki and I can all share his suite."

"I would like to stay," Yousi commented, looking a little uncertain. "If I am invited."

"Of course you are invited," Iason replied.

"You can stay in my suite, Yousi," Heiku whispered, smiling.

"I should be going," Megala said, rising.

"Not so fast," Voshka replied, reaching out to grab Megala's wrist. He smiled up at the Blondie, who stared back at him, looking both perplexed and surprised.

Omaki feigned injury at this. "Vosh, you whore!" he accused.

"Megala, you're not going anywhere." Raoul glared at the Blondie.

Iason frowned. "Yes, Megala, before you go, I'll have you show Odi and Ayuda where these...hidden passages are."

"I'd like to know myself," Raoul added.

Megala sat down, trembling.

“What about us, Master Iason?” Toma asked, seeming to speak for all the non-Elites.

“After you finish cleaning up dinner, you are all free to do as you please. Since it appears you’ll all be staying, you can pick out your rooms on the east wing.”

“I can give up my suite, Master,” Toma offered. “For Lord Sami.”

Pleased that Toma had surrendered his suite for the comfort of his guests, Iason nodded. “Very good. Thank you, Toma.”

“I have a suite!” Xian announced triumphantly, grinning.

“We all have suites,” Heiku remarked. “So you’re gloating for no reason.”

“Damn. Well, at least I’m not left out then.”

“After you pick out your rooms, you can down to the Saloon, if you like. That is, if your Masters give you leave,” Iason continued.

The Blondies all nodded their agreement, which caused a great deal of excitement among the pets and Furniture. It was rare to be given a “night off” from all duties, especially with permission to visit the Eos Saloon, the hottest social gathering in all of Tanagura for non-Elites.

“Can I go, too?” Riki asked, looking as though he expected Iason to refuse him.

“Yes, Riki. You may go.”

Thrilled, Riki suddenly brightened, for the first time since he’d been reprimanded at the table. He had been privately fuming about the way Iason had treated him at dinner, and had half expected the Blondie to refuse him this privilege, although he would have been furious to have been the only one left out on a night out at the Saloon.

The table was cleared and the Blondies rose, collectively groaning at the effort.

“Do we really have to go all the way up to the Observatory?” Heiku moaned. “I vote for sitting around the fire, down here.”

“I second that,” Omaki added. “If I can make it over to one of those chairs.”

"I claim that big comfortable-looking green chair," Xian announced.

"That's Iason's chair," Raoul remarked.

"Oh. Well I claim--"

"You can't claim chairs. It's first come, first serve," Heiku challenged.

At this, Heiku and Xian gazed at each other, and like children, suddenly dashed over to the arrangement of chairs and divans around the fire. Xian managed to reach the big blue chair first, the one that both of them wanted, and sat down with a triumphant cry.

"It's mine!"

"I could make you give it up, if I really wanted to," Heiku threatened, holding up his bionic hand and rotating the fingers.

Iason shook his head. "Those two never change."

Voshka rose to his feet. "Gentlemen, it has been a pleasure to be in your company, though I think I shall take your leave now and retire to my room. Although I wonder if it would be too much trouble to have some of this delicious food sent there for my new pet. He hasn't eaten, and I'm sure he must be hungry."

"Of course, Vosh. Tai will bring the food to you."

"Why didn't you let your pet come to dinner?" Xian asked, curious.

"He is," now the Commander paused for a moment, "occupied."

"Ah. Occupied. That explains it."

"Commander, I would like to deal with the security issue we discussed before, have I your leave to do so?" Anders asked, anxiously.

"Yes, yes. Go do whatever it is you need to do; I feel quite safe leaving the matter in your hands."

Odi stood up. "Perhaps Lord Chi could show us the passages now?"

"Yes, Megala, let's take care of that now," Iason replied.

Megala nodded, standing up. "I'll show you now. There's a viewing portal in bedroom, actually."

Iason bristled at this. "Show me," he said, quietly.

Megala then walked to the bedroom, followed by Iason, Raoul, Odi, Ayuda, and Anders, while everyone else crowded around not far behind, curious as well.

The Blondie paused at the closed door. "I don't have your access code," he said.

"Well that's something, anyway," Odi remarked.

Iason stepped forward, his signature automatically triggering open the door. Now Megala walked over to the book shelves against one of the walls. "Looks like there's a vase covering it now," he remarked, starting to move it.

"That's a Vergatti," Iason winced. "Be very careful."

Megala froze, not wanting to risk even touching it.

Raoul stepped forward. "I'll move it." With great delicacy, he gently lifted the dark, heavy orange-brown vase and held it.

Megala pointed to the space behind it. "It's right there."

Iason squinted. "I don't see anything."

"It's got a holographic shield." Megala reached forward, disturbing the energy of the holograph.

"You bloody pervert!" Raoul hissed.

"The vase, Raoul," Iason cautioned.

Megala bowed his head, ashamed.

"Do you have one of those in my bedroom, too?" he demanded.

The Blondie nodded, blushing.

"You ought to be to publicly whipped," Raoul threatened, his voice low and dark with anger.

"I know."

"You will be, if Jupiter ever finds out," Omaki remarked.

"You won't tell Jupiter, will you?" Megala pleaded, looking at Iason.

"Of course not. I would never give up a Blondie to Jupiter; in fact, I'm not so sure she would only have you whipped, she would probably tamper with your mind, as well."

“Thank you, Iason,” Megala whispered, feeling shamed that he had misjudged Iason for so long when the Blondie had shown such clemency upon discovering his transgression.

“Perhaps I’ll inform Jupiter,” Raoul grumbled, under his breath. Iason stepped forward, gingerly taking the vase from him and setting it back on the shelf.

“Oh please, Raoul. I’ll make it up to you. I’ve been thinking about it, and I want to offer you terms of compensation.”

“Let’s hear them,” he replied, crossing his arms on his chest. “They’d better be good.”

“I’ll build a fabulous estate seaside estate for you. One for you, and one for Iason. At my own expense. Anything you would like.”

Raoul was silent for a moment, immediately tempted by the offer. He had been craving such a resort ever since he’d visited the immense seaside villa of Xanthus Kahn. “Bigger than Kahn’s villa?”

“Oh, far bigger. And much grander; whatever you like, I shall build a palace for you. And for Iason.”

Raoul smiled, for the first time since Megala’s confession. “In that case, I accept your terms.”

“As do I,” Iason added.

“Are you sure you didn’t build any peepholes in my Tower?” Omaki whined. “A seaside estate sounds pretty good to me.”

The Blondies all laughed at this, everyone relaxing a bit. Both Iason and Raoul felt compensated for the rather egregious violation of privacy they had endured, and among Blondies, compensation was an important concept; to accept compensation meant all grievances were forgiven and the slate was wiped clean. Neither Iason nor Raoul could now bring up Megala’s indiscretion, except in the context of friendly teasing.

“Then, there’s no actual access into the room?” Odi pressed. “Just a viewing portal?”

“No. The passageway goes by the room. There’s only a chair there,” he added, blushing.

Raoul paled at this, but said nothing.

“There’s no way inside the penthouse?” Anders repeated.

“Actually, yes, there is. There’s a...passage way off the cellar.”

“How can you have a cellar in a penthouse?” Xian demanded, having surrendered his prized chair by the fire to witness the unveiling of Megala’s secret perversions.

“There’s an entire floor beneath the penthouse,” Megala explained.

“It’s where I keep my wine,” Iason added. “Then, there’s some sort of hidden door down there?”

“Yes. It’s behind the far wall; there’s a tapestry over it, at least there was when I build the wine cellar. I’ve never actually used it.”

“I’m glad to hear it,” Iason remarked.

“Does it lead out of the Tower?” Ayuda asked.

“No. Well, not exactly. All the passageways are connected, but the only way to get to them is through my suite.”

“So, if someone got into your suite, they could have access to any place in the Tower where a passage leads, including the penthouse,” Odi clarified, frowning.

Megala nodded. “Yes, that’s right. Although the door in my suite is well hidden, and the penthouse is the only other place in the tower that actually connects to the passageways.”

“Why did you put in a secret door to my penthouse, Megala?” Iason asked, curious.

“I don’t know. I guess because I could. It gave me...um, a sense of power over you.” Megala looked shamed at this confession, his head bowed.

“We’ll go down and check it out. You realize we’ll have to post a guard there until we seal off the passageways,” Odi murmured. “And we should have additional security at Megala’s suite.”

“Yes, of course. Hire whatever security you need.”

At that, Odi, Ayuda and Anders rushed off to investigate the hidden door beneath the penthouse.

Iason sighed. “Then. Let’s consider this matter closed, and get on with the rest of the evening.”

“I’ll be going then,” Megala said, softly.

“Now, now. No sense rushing off,” Raoul replied, throwing an arm around Megala as though they were good friends. “Stay the night. Let’s talk about that estate.”

The Blondie brightened at this, thrilled that Raoul appeared to have completely forgiven him. “Yes, of course! I have lots of ideas for it. Actually I’ve already drawn up a few different ones.”

“Have you now?” Raoul was pleased with this confession, feeling it showed that Megala had truly regretted his error and had intended to make restitution. Although Raoul could become quite angry when he felt he’d been wronged, he was also very good about letting old disputes go, once he’d made a determination the matter was settled. “I hope you put in fountains. I want lots of fountains. And a pool. And...a game room.”

“Yes, yes. Whatever you like.”

The Blondies all returned to the great hall, and everyone else made for the east wing to pick out their rooms, having found that Tai had single-handedly cleared the table while they had crowded around outside Iason’s room.

Xian and Heiku both dashed for the blue chair, this time Heiku arriving first. Xian, irritated, sat on top of him. “I’m not moving until you give me this chair,” he announced.

“We’ll see about that,” Heiku replied, whirling his fingers and tickling Xian’s ass with them.

The Blondie yelped and jumped up.

“Help yourselves to the bar,” Iason offered, moving there to pour himself some wine. “It’s fully stocked.”

“Guess Heiku won’t be having anything,” Xian remarked, pouring himself a cognac. “Unless he’s prepared to give up the chair.”

“Yousi,” Heiku purred, “would you be ever so kind and bring me cognac?”

“Of course,” Yousi answered, moving to do so.

“No, Yousi! You’re not his slave!” Xian protested. “Make him get it himself!”

“Would you two stop already,” Omaki scolded. “It’s like you’re both still eleven.”

“Yes,” Raoul agreed. “Try to show a little dignity, for Jupiter’s sake.”

“Say what you will,” Heiku replied, crossing his legs. “I’m still not giving up the chair.”

The Blondies all settled down by the fire, and proceeded to engage in a few minutes of friendly banter.

“Are we going to talk about the logs?” Yousi asked, finally.

The Blondies all fell silent.

“The what?” Megala asked.

“The logs. The ones we were discussing,” Yousi repeated. “The ones I think we should burn.”

“Yousi,” Heiku whispered, gently.

“What?” Yousi looked back at him, eyes wide.

“Megala doesn’t know about the logs.”

Megala frowned, looking at the fire. “The logs are already burning,” he remarked, confused.

“Not those logs, the ones about Jupiter. The ones I wrote.”

“Yousi,” Heiku whispered, urgently. “Hush, love.”

Now Megala suddenly seemed to realize something was going on, and further, Yousi’s remark sparked a memory. “You mean the logs that Jupiter punished you for?” he asked, in a low voice.

“Why did you tell me to hush?” Yousi asked, frowning. “Aren’t you going to tell him?”

“Oh hell,” Heiku sighed, closing his eyes.

“We might as well tell him now,” Raoul remarked.

Now distressed, Yousi looked around the room. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No, Yousi,” Heiku answered. “Never mind.”

“I’m not sure we should discuss this here. Perhaps we should adjourn to the Observatory,” Iason suggested.

“Do you really think it makes a difference?” Raoul countered. “If Jupiter is spying on you, surely she has the entire penthouse under watch.”

Iason considered for a moment.

“Jupiter’s spying on you?” Megala repeated.

“I don’t know that for certain. I only...have my suspicions.”

“She’s probably spying on all of us,” Heiku added. “If I was Jupiter, that’s what I’d do.”

Iason sighed. “You’re probably right. If Jupiter is watching, it doesn’t really matter where we go.”

“Then we shouldn’t talk about it at all,” Xian advised, nervously.

Heiku shook his head. “We’ve already put it on the table. Nothing’s happened so, I think we’re safe.”

“She could just be waiting to see what we do,” Raoul argued.

“What you do about what?” Megala pressed, now beside himself with curiosity. “Are you going to let me in on this little secret you all have?”

The Blondies fell silent, looking to Iason.

“Very well,” the Blondie nodded.

* * *

Voshka made his way to his room, smiling to himself as he anticipated the night ahead. He was looking forward to enjoying his new pet; by now, the robotic plug should have completely opened him and he could take him for the first time without restraint. It was a rather long process, but one that the Commander felt was necessary; he tended to be a bit rough in his acquisitions, and he didn’t want to do any damage. He’d learned his lesson with Aranshu and wasn’t about to do it again.

Aranshu had never forgiven him for the way he’d been taken the first time, and even when Voshka found himself falling in love with the little Aristian pet, he’d never been able to win his heart. When Aranshu managed to escape, the Commander had been heartbroken; he’d never found his beloved pet, and even now, just thinking about it made his old sorrow freshen its grip on his soul.

But he had an evening’s pleasure ahead of him and he was determined to enjoy it; he forced himself to push to the back of his

heart the immense darkness within that always rose whenever he thought of his favorite pet. In his life there had only been two individuals he'd ever truly loved, and he'd lost them both. His brother, Anori, and Aranshu.

For the Commander, sex had replaced emotional intimacy, and he engaged in coital pursuits with shocking frequency, going from one partner to the next without ever making a true connection. He knew he was gifted in the art of pleasure, and he enjoyed the sex immensely, no question. But in truth, he knew he would give up all his partners without a second thought if only he could have Aranshu back in his arms.

He went into the suite, smiling when saw Azka lying on the bed, asleep. His pet opened his eyes at his approach.

"I was hoping you would come," Azka yawned. "I need to...take care of certain things. I keep falling asleep, though."

"It's good that you slept," Voshka replied, arching an eyebrow. "You'll not get much sleep tonight. I'm quite aroused."

He walked over to the bed, examining the robotic plug, which had shut off. "Ah yes. You're quite ready for me. Very good." He removed the device, carefully.

"I need to, um," Azka began, hesitantly.

"Go do whatever you need to do," Voshka replied, smoothly. "And you'll have your dinner first, before we do anything. Tai is sending it to the room."

"Thank you, Master," Azka replied, pleased that the Commander was so attentive to his needs. This was unusual in a Master, according to Academy teaching. Pets were prepared to be ignored by their Masters until they wanted a performance, relying almost entirely on Furniture to attend to them. But then, Voshka wasn't Amoian, and Azka found himself rather glad of it. Already he liked him, and was eager to please him.

After cleaning himself up, Azka found his dinner waiting for him. He sat down at the small table off the kitchenette, smiling at the meal before him. "This looks amazing," he breathed.

“Oh yes. It’s quite delicious. Iason’s chef is very gifted; perhaps I shall have to carry him off with us back to Alpha Zen. Go ahead, I’ve already eaten.”

Smiling at his Master’s teasing about kidnapping the chef, Azka proceeded to eat his dinner. “What’s it like on Alpha Zen?” he asked, in between bites.

The Commander sat down at the table, smiling. “You’ll like it, I think. I have a very grand palace. Although you might find it a bit cold. The winters are very severe and very long.”

“I don’t mind. I like snow.”

“Then you shall like Alpha Zen. Although we have beautiful summers, as well. They’re very short, but during that time we have continuous sunlight, and lots of festivals.”

“I heard Ultanum is an incredible city.”

“It is, that,” Voshka nodded. “A fabulous mixture of old architecture and modern technology.”

“Are you the Emperor?”

“In a manner of speaking.”

“I’ve heard lots of stories about you.”

“Have you, now?”

“Yes. They told us at the Academy. About your military campaigns and how you took over the Senate.”

“Well. In my view, it’s always good to have an ambition.”

“Not many people could do what you did, though,” Azka observed. “You must be really smart.”

“Or very lucky,” Voshka replied, smiling. “How is the food?”

“Oh! Delicious! So how did you do it, exactly? Take over the Senate?”

“Ah. I have an army and an air fleet. They’re very loyal. With that kind of power behind you, you can take whatever you want.”

“Are you going to invade Amoi?” Azka asked this without seeming to have any view on the issue, as though he had simply inquired into whether was planning on sleeping on the right or left side of the bed.

Voshka laughed. "I have no reason to do that. I have everything I want on Alpha Zen. Besides, this is Iason's terrain. I rather like him--all the Blondies, for that matter. I'd prefer have them as friends, not enemies."

"Azka nodded. "That's good. I prefer having friends, too. With enemies you always have to look behind you."

"Well said. Though I can't imagine your having any enemies."

"Oh! I was rather unpopular at the Academy. The other pets really looked down on me, I'm not even exactly sure why."

"Jealousy," Voshka suggested, smiling. "They saw in you what I saw--something special."

"Hmmm." Azka thought about this for a moment. "I wish they could see me now."

"Would you like that? We can stop by the Academy before we leave Amoi, and they can all see that I chose YOU over all the others. You can say goodbye to them."

"Can we?" Azka asked, eagerly.

"Of course."

"I can't wait!" Azka, though not a particularly vindictive creature, nevertheless had faced significant social ostracism at the Academy, and was looking forward to the chance to show off his good fortune. He reveled in the thought, smiling, then sighed. "I don't think I can eat anything else."

Voshka looked at his plate. "You haven't eaten half of it."

"It's too much. I have a small stomach, I guess. It was very good."

The Commander rose to his feet. "Well then. Shall we adjourn to the bed?"

"Let me brush my teeth first."

"Please do."

Azka took care of this important item of grooming, then returned to the bedroom, finding the Commander already waiting for him, completely naked and fondling himself.

"You are very handsome," the boy remarked, immediately starting to develop an erection.

“As are you. Come, lie with me.”

Azka crawled onto the bed, and Commander pulled him close, stroking his hair. “Are you afraid?” he whispered.

“No. I feel comfortable with you.”

“Good. I don’t want to hurt you. I want you to be happy with me, Azka.”

“I think I will be. You’re very nice.”

“I will try to be gentle with you, for now. But there may be times when I’m a bit rough. It doesn’t mean I’m upset with you, but sometimes I just need to let off a little anger.”

“What do you get angry about?”

The Commander sighed. “Oh, there’s always something. My position...well, it’s rather stressful at times. And, I should tell you right away, there is something I am looking for. Something I lost, years ago. I can’t find it, and sometimes I get very upset about it.”

“It must have been very special, for you to be so upset,” Azka commented. “I lost a favorite earring once. I was so mad! And then I saw Hentu wearing it. He said it was his but I KNOW it was mine. That thief!”

Voshka smiled. “You shall have whatever earrings you want. In fact, you shall have whatever you want, Azka. Just tell me, and I will get it for you.”

Azka fell silent, and Voshka rolled onto his side, looking down at him as he stroked the soft skin of his face. “You’re a very pretty boy, Azka.”

The boy looked up at him, eyes wide. “You smell good,” he whispered. “And I feel aroused, just being here with you.”

“As do I.” With that, Voshka bent down and began to kiss his pet, gently opening his mouth with his tongue. They kissed for a long time; the Commander was moving at a very slow pace, determined to make the boy ready for him.

After awhile he broke away, smiling. “That was very good,” he whispered.

“I liked it, too.”

“Are you ready to do a bit more?”

“Yes, Master.” In fact, Azka was eager to proceed, now fully engorged.

But Voshka continued to love him in a deliberate, unhurried fashion, kissing his neck and sucking on his nipples, first one and then the other, and then back to the first one again. The Commander had full control, able to prolong the sex as long as was necessary, having learned to master his own arousal perfectly, and to think first of his partner’s needs.

He rolled onto his back, pulling his pet onto his body and running his hands slowly the length of his body, over his buttocks and between his thighs, all the while kissing him. Then he placed him back on the bed, moving down between his legs.

“Oh, Master,” Azka moaned, beside himself with excitement. “You are so good to me. I should be doing...something.”

“Hush. Just relax, and let me love you.”

Azka allowed his fingers to tangle in the Commander’s soft, dark hair, gasping when he Voshka finally took hold of his erection, his tongue and mouth offering him pleasures beyond his wildest expectations. His eyes rolled back and he found himself almost in tears, so intense was the experience and happiness at being chosen by someone like Voshka Khosi. He had never imagined his life being anything more than an opportunity to serve a Blondie for one or two years, anticipating that he would then be sent to the Midas brothels or an open club to perform the remainder of his life, which was the fate of most pets on Amoi.

As he shifted into his ascent, he began crying out openly, desperately, unable to contain or package his response into a more scripted, subtle offering, but this is exactly what Voshka wanted--genuine, unrestrained passion, however clumsy or uncontrolled.

For some moments afterwards, the Commander simply gazed at the boy, enjoying the look of pure rapture on his face.

Azka had been completely transported. He opened his eyes, looking up at his Master in awe. “That was incredible.”

“Good. I was hoping you would enjoy it. Do you feel ready for me now?”

“Yes. You don’t have to ask me. I am your pet; you can take me whenever you want.”

Voshka closed his eyes at this invitation, trembling now that he felt he had gained his pet’s permission to proceed. “Turn onto your stomach,” he whispered.

Azka did so, and the Commander reached for a vial of oil he had placed by the bed, carefully coating his entire length and gritting his teeth to keep from ejaculating. He moved on top of him, nuzzling his neck and kissing his shoulder as he positioned himself. “Spread your legs for me, Azka,” he instructed, softly, sighing when the boy immediately opened for him.

He pressed himself up against his pet’s portal, sliding his hands under the boy’s body as he slowly entered. Azka accommodated him perfectly, admitting him completely and yet gripping him with a pleasing tightness. “Ohhh,” he shuddered, pulling out and sinking into him again. After a few moments of slow thrusting, he finally gave into his own needs, taking his pet hard, as deep as he could manage, groaning and straining as he moved toward his goal.

And then he thought of Aranshu. He gave a long, anguished moan, imagining it was his long lost pet beneath him. Then in the next moment, he was climaxing...and weeping.

Azka lay silently beneath his Master, puzzled over the man’s tears. He felt that something terrible must have happened to the Commander to have made him suddenly break down at what should have been a deeply satisfying moment. He listened to the man’s weeping, feeling very sad, and unsure what to do.

The Academy had not prepared him for something like this.

* * *

“Give me one of those,” Katze demanded, snapping his fingers. Sighing with mock irritation, Riki surrendered one of his smokes.

“Can I have one?” Kahlan asked, gazing longingly at the pack of Dark Baccalias.

“Sure.”

“Can I try one?” Daryl asked.

“No, you may not,” Katze answered.

“I wasn’t asking you. I was asking Riki.”

“And I’m telling you no.”

“Why not?” Daryl demanded.

“Because I said so.”

Daryl pouted at this. “How come you get to smoke then?”

“Because I’m already ruined. I’ll be dead before I’m 50.”

“Don’t say that!”

Katze shrugged. “Probably true.”

“It’s a disgusting habit,” Sarius commented, looking at Kahlan and wishing the boy didn’t look so sexy when he smoked. “I don’t know why anyone does it.”

Kahlan met his gaze, saying nothing, looking as though he was trying to keep from smiling.

“What are you smiling at?” Sarius demanded.

“Your jealousy,” Kahlan replied.

“Don’t start with me.”

“Why not? Afraid I’ll finish you?”

“Would you two please stop,” Ru pleaded. “I was hoping you’d get along.”

“I’m cool,” Kahlan shrugged. “He’s the one with the problem.”

At that moment Tai and Toma joined them at their table at the Eos Saloon, followed by Yui, who looked a bit upset. He was trailed by Raoul’s new pet, though the other pets had already wandered off to the game rooms.

“Get me a drink,” the pet demanded.

Yui ignored him, sitting down at the table.

“Hey! I’m talking to you!”

“Fuck off,” Yui replied.

The others laughed at this.

“Yui,” Katze scolded, though he struggled not to smile.

“What? I’m not going to wait on him.”

"I shall tell Lord Am, and he will discipline you," the pet announced. "You are a most unsatisfactory Furniture."

"And you're a pain in the ass, Puki."

This brought on more laughter, for various reasons.

"Puki?" Riki repeated, after he managed to catch his breath. "His name is Puki?"

"My Master hasn't named me," the pet retorted, though looked a bit uncertain.

"He says I can name you, and you look like a Puki to me."

"Yui." Now Katze was a bit more stern. "Watch yourself; I'm sure he will tell Raoul, and then you'll be in for it."

"Yes, you will. But anyway, I don't need you; I see some old friends. I think I'll go over there and tell them how poorly you've been treating me."

Yui shrugged. "Suit yourself."

The pet turned on his heels, looking extremely indignant.

"Why did you do that?" Katze demanded. "You know he'll tell Raoul."

"I hate him, and I don't care if he tells."

"You should care," Sarius remarked. "He could make life very difficult for you."

"He treats me like I'm nothing!"

"Yeah, that's how pets are, Yui. You know that."

"Some of them, anyway," Daryl agreed. "Riki was the first pet that really treated me nice."

Riki blinked. "Aww. Really?"

Ru nodded. "It's true. Pets can be very rude."

"Speaking of pets, where's Enyu?"

"He stayed behind. I think he's feeling a bit out of sorts, having come into his rut early and all."

Riki looked a bit disappointed at this. "Too bad. I was hoping to have a little fun with him."

"Riki, you're incorrigible," Daryl sighed.

"Why don't you like Enyu, Riki?" Ru asked. "He's actually very sweet, and he's good with Aki, too."

“Cats and mongrels don’t get along.”

Katze smiled at this. “Riki’s jealous.”

“What! I’m not bloody jealous!”

“Sure you are. Although I’ll admit, he wasn’t very nice to you.”

“Thank you for that, anyway. He was a complete dickhead.”

Ru shook his head. “He’s always been nice to me.”

“I think Enyu was jealous of Riki, too,” Daryl remarked. “They were both competing for Iason’s attention.”

Riki snorted at this. “I wasn’t competing! He can have him.”

“Who can have who?” Sarius asked.

“They can have each other, I don’t care.”

“You don’t mean that,” Katze replied. “You’re just angry with Iason over what happened this evening.”

“And I’m entitled. He treated me like shit!”

Daryl shook his head. “No, Riki. Iason loves you.”

“No, he doesn’t. You saw how he treated me.”

Katze took a deep drag, studying him. “Don’t you get it? He wanted to show you off, and instead you rebelled. I thought you were going to be smart, like you were earlier in the day when you came in wearing those chains. Instead you started mouthing off.”

“That’s what I mean, though, he’s never satisfied. He says one thing in the bedroom and then in public he treats me like scum.”

“Not like scum, Riki,” Juthian replied. “He treats you like a pet, and that’s what you are.”

“None of you understand.”

“I think I do,” Kahlan interjected. “It would be really hard for me, too, to be someone’s pet. When you’re used to being on your own, and all.”

“Exactly. Thank you.” Riki eyed Kahlan with new respect, offering him a slight smile. “So where are you from again? Aristia?”

“Yeah.”

“How did you end up here?” Tai asked, curious.

Kahlan sighed. “It’s a long story. My family was killed in the Massacre, and so I took a job as a messenger. That’s when I met Omaki, I was delivering him a capsule.”

“What, and Omaki just took you in?” Riki asked.

“Yeah. He’s been really nice to me, I’m not even sure why.”

“Master Omaki is a good Blondie,” Ru asserted.

“I’m sorry about your family, Kahlan,” Tai whispered.

“Me too,” Juthian offered.

The others all nodded.

Kahlan stared at his half-empty bottle of stout, his face an expressionless mask. “Thanks.”

Riki drained his stout, holding it up for the bartender to see. “Hey! Another round over here!” he called.

The bartender rushed over with a tray of drinks. “Anything else, Riki-sama?” he asked, nervously. It was the first time he’d ever waited on Iason Mink’s famous pet, and once he’d learned his identity, he’d taken special precautions to make him feel as welcome as possible.

Riki was eating it up, grinning. “See? This is how a pet SHOULD be treated,” he asserted, after the bartender rushed off to bring him some chips.

“He’s treating you like that because you’re the pet of Iason Mink,” Katze pointed out.

“Toma, are you okay?” Juthian whispered, concerned. “You look really stressed out.”

Toma shook his head. “I can’t say.”

“Oh!” Sarius pushed his chair closer. “Now we INSIST you tell us.”

“I can’t.”

“Why can’t you tell us?” Riki demanded.

“Because...they’d...I don’t know what they’d do.”

“Who is ‘they’?” Katze pressed.

“Master Iason and...the others. The Masters.”

Sarius frowned. “ALL the Masters? What’s going on, Toma?”

Now all eyes were on Toma, who shook his head, looking frightened. “No! I can’t tell you!”

“Is there a problem?” Katze asked, quietly.

“There might be. I don’t know. I can’t say!”

“Are our Masters in danger?” Ru asked, worried.

Toma refused to answer, staring down at the table.

“Toma! You have to tell us!” Sarius insisted, no longer interested in gossip but legitimately concerned for his Master.

Toma took a deep breath, closing his eyes.

“Please tell us,” Juthian pleaded. “Is something going to happen to Master Xian?”

“They’re...I’m not sure exactly what they’re planning, but they seem to be considering doing something that Jupiter wouldn’t like.”

After a stunned silence, everyone began talking at once.

“What do you mean?” Katze demanded. “Like what?”

“I don’t know! I only heard part of the conversation. They didn’t even see me come in, they were arguing about it. Masters Raoul and Iason. Iason said something about Jupiter not knowing about the Observatory, because Raoul was worried Jupiter was listening. I heard Master Iason say, ‘You’re not even giving this careful consideration.’ And then Master Raoul said, ‘That’s because I care about you. It’s too dangerous.’ And something else about Yousi, I can’t remember exactly. They saw me and then they seemed very upset that I had heard the conversation.”

For a long moment, no one said anything.

Riki stood up. “I’m going back.”

“Agreed,” Katze said. “We’d better find out what’s going on.”

They all jumped up and left the Saloon, the bartending rushing out behind them, carrying a basket of chips.

* * *

Megala looked at Iason in disbelief. “You’re seriously considering this? Turning against Jupiter?”

“Yes.”

“I’ve made my position clear,” Raoul announced. “I’m completely against this. It’s foolish to even think about it.”

“What do you think, Megala?” Omaki asked, quietly.

“I don’t think you can do it. Jupiter will find out, and then we’ll all be in serious trouble.”

“That’s my view,” Xian nodded.

“But what if we could?” Heiku countered.

“What is so wrong with leaving things as they are?” Raoul demanded. “Jupiter takes care of us. She asks a lot in return, but she made us. She deserves our loyalty.”

Now Iason turned to Raoul. “Would you feel the same, if she made you give up Yui?”

Raoul frowned. “I wouldn’t like it. But if Jupiter insisted, I’d have to obey.”

“Then you’re not with us on this?” Heiku demanded.

“I didn’t realize you were for it, Heiku,” Raoul retorted. “Sounds like you’ve made up your mind.”

“Not necessarily, although I confess I’m leaning towards it, yes.”

“I don’t think we should proceed without unanimous agreement,” Iason announced. “So it sounds as though we should simply burn the logs.”

“Not so fast,” Omaki replied, quietly. “I think we should talk about this some more.”

At that moment, Odi and Ayuda came into the hall, and the Blondies fell silent.

“Did you find it?” Iason asked.

Odi nodded. “Yes. Anders is keeping guard for now. Master Iason, there’s something else I should tell you; I can’t imagine how I could have failed to do so already, although things have been extraordinary these past few days, and I confess I didn’t get much sleep last night.”

“What are you getting at?” Iason pressed, a bit annoyed with Odi’s rambling, and anxious to resume their important conversation.

Odi held up the residual scanner. “It’s about this. The residual detector. I managed to acquire one and I started a scan earlier, only

I was...well, to be honest, I drank the punch, and then," he paused, embarrassed.

Iason nodded. "Go on. Did you find something?"

"Yes. Around the swimming pool. There was...almost a ring of very strong residual signatures there."

The Blondies all looked puzzled at this. "Why the pool?" Raoul wondered aloud.

Odi shook his head. "But I wanted to tell you. I'll complete the scan now then?"

"Please do."

Heiku frowned. "He's talking about picking up residuals from some sort of spying device, Iason?"

"Yes. They couldn't find anything in the penthouse, but we were thinking possibly there had been a device attached to an individual, or one that had moved, leaving enough transmission particles behind to detect."

"If he's saying they've picked up residuals, that means there's a device," Raoul observed.

At that moment, Riki and the others came rushing back into the penthouse.

"What is it?" Iason demanded, paling when he saw Riki's expression. "Is something wrong? Why have you all come back?"

"We want you to stop whatever it is your planning. Toma told us."

"I knew it!" Raoul exclaimed.

Katze stepped forward. "Iason. Toma said it was dangerous. Surely you're not thinking of doing something incredibly foolish?"

"I'll tell you one thing," Raoul growled, "and it's I'd sooner proceed than take orders from pets and Furniture!"

"We're not ordering anyone," Katze replied, calmly. "We're just concerned."

A sudden scream startled everyone, and in the next moment Odi was dragging Enyu into the hall by the hair. "I found it!" He threw Enyu to the floor.

“Found what? How dare you treat my pet so!” Omaki challenged, extremely displeased with the way the bodyguard had handled his beloved pet.

“The spy! He’s got a broadcaster embedded in his pet ring!”

A stunned silence followed this announcement.

Enyu looked up at the Blondies, wide-eyed. “I didn’t know it was there. Honest!”

“I don’t understand. What’s a broadcaster?” Riki whispered.

“It’s a relay device,” Odi explained. “It uses existing technology, such as a camera security system already installed, and bounces the information to another location.”

Riki shook his head. “What does that mean?”

Suddenly it was as though the entire penthouse began to shake. A low hum, Jupiter’s signature, increased in power and vibration, leaving no doubt that Jupiter had heard all. The communications center lit up with a red warning light, and an incoming message printed out on Iason’s inbox.

With trembling fingers, the Blondie went over to the box and picked up a summons.

From Jupiter.

Jupiter Speaks

With trembling fingers, Iason picked up the summons from his inbox. He stared at the words and then paled, reaching back to steady himself on his desk.

“Iason. What is it? What does it say?” Raoul demanded, anxiously.

“We’re finished.” The Blondie closed his eyes, trying to fight off the sudden pain that shot into his head.

“What do you mean?” Heiku stepped forward. “What does it say?”

Iason shook his head. “This is all my doing. I should be the one being punished. How could I have been so foolish?” The summons slipped from his fingers, floating gently to the floor.

Omaki moved forward and picked it up, his face betraying his own horror as he read the summons.

“Read it! We’re all standing here waiting!” Raoul yelled.

Taking a deep breath, Omaki looked up, nodding. “All right. It’s a summons, from Jupiter:

Disciplinary Summons #0008

Iason Mink

Omaki Ghan

Heiku Quiahtenon

Raoul Am

Xian Sami
Megala Chi

You have all been found of serious violations of the General Code, including conspiracy and sedition. Your actions constitute transgressions of a grave nature that require immediate and severe discipline. With the exception of Iason Mink, you are hereby ordered to remain sequestered in the estate of Iason Mink and are prohibited from leaving the Eos Tower, for any reason, until tomorrow, the 8th day of the 11th month at the 13th hour of the mid-day, at which time you will be escorted to the Plaza to be publicly whipped, according to the following sentence:

Xian Sami, for violation of
Section X998.5 - 5 strikes
Megala Chi, for violation of
Section A1048 - 10 strikes
Raoul Am, for violation of
Sections F214 and X998.5 - 20 strikes,
reduced to 15

Heiku Quiahtenon, for violation of
Sections C107, F214.5, and X998.5 - 20 strikes

Omaki Ghan, for violation of
Sections C107 and X999 - 25 strikes
Iason Mink, for violation of

Sections C107, X999 and X999.5 - 60 strikes

Iason Mink, you are hereby ordered to report immediately to my chambers, afterwhich you will return to your estate and remain sequestered with the others until your sentence is carried out.

So ordered by Jupiter on this the 457st day of the year 5139.”

For a long moment the room was dead silent.

“Sixty?” Riki whispered, feeling the blood drain from his face. Sixty strikes with a whip. That was enough to kill a mongrel. He voiced the horror that everyone else felt at the severity of Jupiter’s sentence.

Raoul sat back down, burying his face in his hands.

Yousi finally broke the silence, leaning toward Heiku. “I don’t understand,” he whispered. “What happened?”

“We’re being punished,” Heiku replied, bitterly. “Jupiter was listening, all along.”

“Might I remind everyone that this Xeronian is still wearing a broadcaster,” Odi remarked.

“Well, remove it!” Xian bellowed.

“It’s embedded in his pet ring,” Odi replied, aiming his laser at Enyu’s ankle.

Enyu stared up at him, horrified. “I didn’t know,” he whispered, meekly.

“I find that hard to believe,” the bodyguard retorted. “I should just blow off your entire foot.”

“Odi!” Tai hissed, shocked at his lover’s sudden cruelty.

“He deserves it!”

“Master,” Enyu whimpered, looking toward the Blondie imploringly.

Omaki, who had been standing in a state of shock, stepped forward, frowning. "Come now. You'll not harm my pet. I'll remove the ring." He knelt down and released the ring with his signature, handing it to Odi, who immediately disarmed the device.

"Jupiter didn't mention anything about our ranks or confiscation of our property," Heiku pointed out.

"Or neurosurgery," Raoul said, thoughtfully.

Xian nodded. "That's true. Does that mean we're only to be physically disciplined?"

Omaki turned to Iason. "You'd better go. Jupiter is expecting you."

Iason nodded.

"What about our pets? What about," Raoul's gaze flicked to Yui, who was watching the unfolding scene with horror.

Now Iason looked toward Riki, who gazed back at him, eyes wide with confusion and fear. "I'll find out what I can," he replied, then shook his head. "I should have known better. And now I've involved all of you."

"Don't try to take all the blame," Omaki answered. "I'm the one who brought you the logs. But your punishment is the most severe, Iason."

Raoul shook his head. "Sixty strikes. I've never heard of such a thing. My sentence is nothing in comparison."

"I wager you'll feel every one of those 15 strikes, Raoul," Omaki remarked. "I confess, I'm feeling rather like a schoolboy about to visit Headmaster Konami's chambers." The Blondie tried to joke to hide his terror, but in fact he was completely stunned at the severity of Jupiter's sentence. Blondies were very rarely publicly whipped, and those that were never endured more than 10 lashes.

"Why did Jupiter reduce mine to 15?" Raoul wondered.

"Because you were so dead-set against the whole thing, that's my guess," Heiku announced. "Although I would like to read the sections of the code Jupiter claims I've violated."

“Well, it should be obvious enough in your case what the code refers to: sedition and unsanctioned restoration of a eunuch attendant,” Xian answered.

“What’s the third violation, then?”

“Iason, have you the General Code somewhere?” Raoul asked.

“Of course. In the library. Daryl, please retrieve the book.”

“Yes Master,” Daryl murmured, rushing off to find the wanted book.

Sighing, Iason moved toward the door. “I must go.”

Katze and Sarius moved aside to let the great Blondie pass, but Riki stepped in front of him.

“Don’t go,” he whispered.

“I have no choice, pet,” he replied, and then, more softly, “but I’ll not get much more than a reprimand. Jupiter has already announced my punishment.”

The other Blondies exchanged nervous looks at this, wondering if it were true.

“What if she takes away your...your Syndicate thing? What will happen to you?”

“Then, I’ll retire to my villa and live a more comfortable life,” he replied, attempting to smile. He leaned forward to whisper softly in his pet’s ear. “Step aside, love. I must face this. I chose to break Jupiter’s laws and now I must face the consequences.”

Riki darkened at this, turning to follow the Blondie as he left the penthouse. But the door hummed shut in his face.

“Jupiter’s laws!” he shouted. “Jupiter can bloody suck my dick, the wiry bitch!”

“Riki,” Katze reproached, sharply.

“I don’t care! What if she touches him? What if she makes him, like that one?” he pointed wildly to Yousi, furious.

The mongrel, however inappropriately, voiced the worst fears of nearly everyone there.

“I don’t think so,” Omaki replied, thoughtfully. “She wouldn’t tamper with his mind and then whip him so severely afterwards. He wouldn’t understand what was going on.”

“That’s true,” Raoul nodded, hopefully.

“But isn’t it odd that she didn’t mention our rank or property?” Heiku pointed out again. “I mean, with Yousi,” he glanced at the Blondie and then lowered his voice, “his punishment was laid out in his summons and she followed it, word for word. And was immediately seized from his villa. So maybe that means we’re only to be whipped?”

“I don’t know if only is the appropriate word to use,” Omaki remarked, wryly. “Explain to me how any Blondie could endure 60 strikes with a whip?”

Raoul and Riki looked equally worried at this, both of them instinctively turning to Heiku.

“What do you think? Can he survive that?” Raoul asked, anxiously.

Heiku considered it for a moment. “I think so. To be safe, he’ll be forced to ask for acceleration.”

“Acceleration! That would be pure torture!” Raoul exclaimed, and for once, Riki was in complete agreement with him.

“She’s evil,” Riki whispered, his eyes flashing darkly. “How could she be so cruel?”

“Pets, all of you--please retire to your rooms,” Raoul commanded, with a dismissive wave of his hand. “We need to discuss this in private without being interrupted.”

“You’re not in charge here,” Riki shot back, hotly.

Katze answered that by punching him in the arm. “Hey. Back off, Riki.”

“YOU fucking back off! Am I the only who cares what’s going to happen to Iason?”

“We all care what’s going to happen,” Raoul retorted, irritated. “And how DARE you talk back to me!”

“Riki, come on,” Katze urged, taking hold of his arm. “You heard him, let’s go.”

“Why does HE think he can come in here and take over?” Riki demanded, trying to squirm away from Katze’s grip. “I have as much a stake in what happens as he does--more than he does!”

“Hush,” Katze hissed, tightening his grip. He leaned down to whisper in Riki’s ear. “Hey. Knock it off! Raoul is a Blondie!”

“Like I really give a fuck! Blondies, Elites, the whole bloody hierarchy--all that means absolutely nothing to me!”

Raoul stood up, walking towards the mongrel. “You. It’s all because of YOU that this is happening. Before you, Iason would never have dreamed of going against Jupiter! He threw it all away because of you!”

Riki frowned, narrowing his eyes. “What is that supposed to mean?”

“As if you don’t know! You’ve destroyed him! And whatever happens to him, I’m holding YOU responsible,” Raoul finished, menacingly.

“Come come, now, Raoul,” Omaki scolded. “No need to start blaming the pets.”

“He ISN’T a pet. He isn’t worthy to be a pet! He’s a filthy mongrel, and it’s because of him that Iason’s fallen from grace!”

Riki stared back coldly. “You’re just jealous. You’re jealous because he loves me, and not you.”

“Bastard!” Raoul, now in a rage, started for Riki but was stopped by both Heiku and Omaki, who leapt forward to restrain him.

“That’s enough,” Heiku announced, sharply. “Leave the pet alone. Sarius! Help move Riki out of here.”

“You too, Ru,” Omaki ordered.

“You’re insane,” Raoul spat, struggling against the two Blondies as Katze, in concert with Sarius and Ru, forced Riki out of the hall. “He can’t possibly love you.” Though Iason had already confessed his love for Riki, Raoul still refused to believe it could be true.

Toma and Tai lingered behind, uncertainly.

“Shall I bring the tea tray?” Tai asked, trying to restore a sense of normalcy to the room.

“Please do,” Omaki nodded. “Bring coffee, as well. We won’t be sleeping much tonight.”

The mongrel turned to look back over his shoulder, scowling. "You're such a dickhead, Raoul."

"Mongrel! Scalawag! I hold you responsible!"

"Scalawag?" Riki laughed at this last jibe, even as he was escorted from the great hall.

"For heaven's sake, Raoul," Heiku snapped, "get control of yourself. He's hardly worth losing your composure over."

"Quite right," Omaki nodded. "It's time you got past this."

"But it's his fault!"

"Come, sit down," Heiku soothed. "You're upset, like the rest of us. But surely, you can't blame Iason's funny little pet for all this?"

"I DO blame him," Raoul replied, his voice shaking with emotion. "I tried to warn Iason so many times. He wouldn't listen!"

"You're blinded by your own feelings," Xian remarked, gently. "You're blaming the pet, but is it his fault Iason was so taken with him?"

"You don't understand."

"Why are you so upset?" Heiku interjected. "You have Yui, very nicely restored--at great personal sacrifice, I might add."

At this, Raoul quieted, his fury dissipating a bit. He sat down, burying his face in his hands with a great sigh. "What's going to happen to him?"

"He's going to be publicly whipped," Yousi answered, studying the summons. "And so are you and...everyone but me."

Raoul shook his head. "His reputation will be ruined. How can he keep his position?"

"Perhaps he can't," Omaki agreed. "For that matter, all of our reputations are ruined."

"What about this one?" Odi asked, pointing to Enyu, who still sat huddled on the floor, in terror.

"Enyu. Go find Aki, and then bring him to me," Omaki ordered.

"Yes, Master." Enyu rose to his feet, rushing off to find Aki.

"You're not going to punish him?" Odi demanded.

Now Omaki, who was typically slow to anger, had finally had enough. "I beg your pardon? Are you addressing me, Guard?"

Odi immediately assumed a look of contrition, bowing slightly. "Forgive me, Lord Ghan."

"Perhaps you can find something useful to do, rather than continue to badger my pet?"

"Of course. Excuse me." Flushing red at the reprimand, Odi left the hall.

"What precisely IS a scalawag, I wonder?" Heiku mused. "Some type of fish?"

"You're thinking of scallops," Yousi suggested.

"I found them," Enyu announced, rushing almost immediately back into the room. "They were just down the hall."

"Why were you all yelling?" Aki asked, as he and Suuki followed him. "Is it a game?"

Omaki sighed, closing his eyes. "Come here, little love."

"We captured all the butterflies," Aki reported, as he walked over to the Blondie.

"Only, one got smashed," Suuki added, sadly. "His wing was broken and now he can't fly."

Omaki sat down by the fire, pulling Aki onto his lap and holding him close.

"You're holding too tight," the boy whimpered.

Suuki frowned, looking around at the solemn faces of the Blondies. "Is something wrong?"

"Sir Elusiaux is here," Askel announced over the intercom, as the door hummed upon.

"I don't want to go!" Suuki yelled, disappointed to see his father.

"Suuki. You've been here quite long enough. You mustn't outstay your welcome. Come, it's late."

The Elite stopped in his tracks, startled with the X900 Guardian spun in front of him to scan his retina.

"Don't mind that, it's only a security device," Omaki explained. "It's just checking your retinal ID against the database."

"Good evening, Sir Elusiaux," the Guardian announced, before whizzing off to a corner of the room.

“My,” the Elite whispered, impressed with the technology, though feeling a bit violated by it.

“It’s not late! It’s not even sunset yet!” Suuki protested.

“Did you hear me? Mind me, Suuki.” The Elite seemed nervous, his gaze flitting from one Blondie to another. “Is Iason not here?”

“He’s...gone on an urgent errand,” Omaki replied.

“I see.”

Resigned to his going-home fate, Suuki now became animated as he described the delights of Aki’s Guardianship Party.

“We had so much fun! We drank silly punch and then we ran around naked, which was Aki’s idea, and after that there was lots of party games, and the Blondies were having sex and making funny noises, and we didn’t get to go swimming because that naked man was chasing Aki, and then Commander Khosi said we can put our Apprentage Ships on Alpha Zen as long as we are naked part of the time, and then we fell asleep, and then we found out about the secret passages and the butterflies all got free, but we captured them all except for, this one, that got his wing broke, and THEN there was...an earthquake!”

Elusiaux stiffened at this, trying unsuccessfully to smile, blinking every time Suuki uttered the word “naked,” which by his reckoning occurred far too many times for his comfort. He hardly knew what to make of Suuki’s description of the party, but he had heard enough rumors about both Iason Mink and Omaki Ghan to believe they might be true. None of the Blondies even attempted to correct the boy’s story.

“Yes, I...that is, we felt some sort of tremor, as well. There’s some talk it was Jupiter?”

Heiku and Omaki exchanged looks, remaining silent.

“Yes, Jupiter was very angry,” Yousi confirmed.

“Hmmm.” The Elite looked from one Blondie to the next, but when no answers were forthcoming, he reached out and pulled Suuki close to him. “We’ll be going, then.”

“Can he come back to play tomorrow?” Aki asked, excited.

“We shall see.”

Suuki looked disappointed with this answer. "That means no," he clarified.

"Why not?" Aki demanded.

"Aki," Omaki scolded, "settle down. You don't address an Elite in that fashion."

Elusiaux seemed to relax a bit at this. "Perhaps...Aki could come and visit Suuki tomorrow?"

"Can I?" Aki screamed.

"Hush." Omaki gave the boy a little shake. "No screaming," he whispered, then looked at Elusiaux, nodding. "It's up to Iason, but I imagine he'll allow it."

"Then, I'll send Suuki over to fetch him in the evening?"

"Unless you hear from Iason otherwise."

The boys were delighted over the prospect of a second day together, and as soon as Suuki left, Aki leapt from Omaki's lap and rushed over to the table, rummaging through his presents.

"What should I take tomorrow?" he asked, excited.

"Aki, go with Enyu now and pick out a room. Then you can take all your presents and put them away in your new room, and then pack your day-bag for tomorrow. But I want you to stay there, in your new room, until I come for you, because we are having an important meeting, and I don't want you to interrupt us."

"Yes, Master!" Aki rushed off with Enyu, thrilled with the prospect of picking out his new room.

"You might as well have told Elusiaux," Xian remarked. "By tomorrow everyone on Amoi will know."

Omaki shrugged. "Why should that fall on us? Let's just let it unfold."

"At least you're not being punished again, Yousi," Heiku sighed.

"I'm not on the list," Yousi agreed, nervously. "Do you think she forgot me?"

"No, love. Jupiter didn't forget you. She knows you didn't do anything wrong."

"But...I sent the logs."

“You’ve already been punished for the logs.” Heiku reached over and tugged on Yousi’s tunic. “Stop fretting. Sit down.”

Yousi found a chair and sat down, frowning. “20 strikes is too many, Heiku,” he whispered. If there was one thing the Blondie still understood, it was discipline, and exactly how much could be endured. 20 lashes with a whip--if administered full strength by a Blondie--was almost unthinkable. Unable to focus on anything other than Heiku’s punishment, Yousi did not even comment on what was in store for Omaki and Iason.

Heiku nodded, glumly. “I know. I’ll survive it, though.”

“You are all so brave,” Megala remarked. “I must admit, I am terrified to take my 10 strikes. I feel I may be sick, just contemplating it.”

Xian nodded. “I feel the same. I feel foolish for saying so, when I’m only at 5.”

“I daresay neither of you will enjoy your punishment, any more than we will,” Omaki remarked. “And I confess, I nearly wet myself, when I read the summons.”

Heiku shook his head. “What a way to spoil a good party.”

“Right. It’s all fun and games until someone gets publicly whipped,” Omaki quipped.

This remark elicited a few smiles, though no one felt much like laughing.

Tai and Toma rolled the tea tray into the room, and began distributing drinks and various sweets to the Blondies.

“Ah! Are those Yurenian truffles?” Megala asked, noticing the tray of desserts.

“Yes, Lord Chi. Would you like some?”

“Please. Three. No, four.”

“Go ahead, take the whole tray, Meg,” Omaki teased.

Megala blushed, instinctively clearing his throat.

The Blondies all groaned.

“Sorry,” Megala murmured.

“Some krevlians, Lord Am?” Tai offered, gently, knowing full well they were Raoul’s favorite. He had contacted the households of

the all the Blondies to determine exactly which sweets they enjoyed best.

Raoul, though continuing to frown, nodded his acceptance, biting into the cream-filled pastry with a sigh.

“Oh dear. You’ve brought pecan rolls,” Heiku noticed.

“Yes, Lord Quiahtenon. Would you like some?”

“Yes, please.”

“I’ll have those cookies,” Yousi announced, having spied a plate of frosted biscuits.

“And Lord Ghan? Cherry cheesecake for you?”

Omaki smiled, realizing that Ru must have alerted the chef as to his favorite dessert. “I happen to love cherry cheesecake.”

“I claim that frozen cream sundae,” Xian yelled.

Heiku rolled his eyes. “What are you yelling for? Idiot. We all have our favorite desserts. That one’s obviously for you.”

“Oh. I still claim it, all the same.”

“But,” Megala said, after swallowing an especially delicious mouthful of truffle, “I wasn’t invited. How did you know this was my favorite?”

Tai smiled. “I called your House. Shimera told me.”

“Did you tell him what is going on?”

“Of course not, Lord Chi. That is, I might have suggested you would be staying the night. He wanted to know if he should come to attend you.”

“Oh. Yes, please have him come. And tell him to bring my...bag. The green one. No! The blue one.”

“Your bag?” Omaki teased. “Did you forget your purse, Meg?”

Megala blushed at this. “It’s for my personals. My intimates.”

“Your,” now Heiku struggled not to laugh, “your intimates?”

The Blondies, except for Raoul, all snickered at Megala’s term for his personal hygiene products, and at the idea of his having a known “bag” for them.

“What was in the green bag, Megala?” Xian teased.

“Yes, Meg? Why blue and not green?” Omaki pressed.

“He keeps his spyglass in the blue one,” Heiku suggested, leaning close to Omaki.

“I don’t see how you all can be merry and gallivanting about, at a time like this,” Raoul grumbled.

“Gallivanting? Doesn’t that involve movement?” Heiku challenged.

“Quite right. We’re all just sitting here. No gallivanting whatsoever,” Omaki nodded.

“Have you forgotten we’re all to be publicly whipped tomorrow?”

“What!” Omaki exclaimed. “Heavens! That DID slip my mind.”

Heiku snorted at this, as did Xian, who suddenly began laughing so hard he started coughing.

“I don’t see how you can find any of this amusing,” Raoul muttered, frowning.

“Me either,” Megala agreed, looking extremely apprehensive.

Now Daryl approached the Blondies, holding the General Code.

“Ah. I’ll take that,” Heiku announced, holding out his hand.

Daryl handed him the book, wondering where Katze and the others had gone. “Can I bring you anything else?” he asked.

“No,” Raoul answered. “You may go now. Go to your quarters until we call you.”

“Yes, Lord Am,” Daryl replied, bowing and then rushing away.

“Yousi! Give me that summons.” Heiku snapped his fingers, impatiently.

Yousi handed it to him, and Heiku began thumbing through the book. “Let’s see. C107. Ah! Here it is: ‘C107. INDEPENDENT CHANNELS. No Amoian shall be in possession of an independent communication device of any kind.’ What! We’re being punished for that!”

“Only you, me and Iason,” Omaki clarified, looking at the summons.

“Xian has one too!” Heiku protested.

Xian rolled his eyes. "Well, just announce it to everyone! Maybe you should yell it out the window in case Jupiter didn't hear!"

"What's X998.5? Most of us have that...except Megala," Omaki prompted.

"Um... 'X998.5: FAILURE TO REPORT. Any Amoian, having knowledge of seditious plans or conspiracies to overthrow the supreme authority of Jupiter, shall report this information immediately.' And here's X999: 'ACTS OF SEDITION. No Amoian shall encourage seditious acts or plot a rebellion against the supreme authority of Jupiter, or shall knowingly conspire with others to violate any law of the General Code.'"

"A1048," Megala urged, anxiously.

"That's all the way at the beginning," Heiku muttered, flipping the book back to the opening pages. "Yes. 'A1048: ARCHITECTURAL SECURITY. Every building constructed on Amoi shall have the correct blueprints filed in Jupiter's mainframe, and failure to provide accurate architectural schematics or the deliberate misrepresentation of any public or private structure shall be considered a serious breach of architectural security.'"

"I can guess what F214 and F214.5 are," Raoul remarked.

Heiku nodded, flipping to the appropriate page. "'F214. UNSANCTIONED RESTORATION. No Amoian shall solicit the sexual restoration of a eunuch servant without Jupiter's explicit approval.' And F214.5, 'PERFORMANCE OF UNSANCTIONED RESTORATION. No Amoian shall perform medical procedures designed to sexually restore a eunuch servant without Jupiter's explicit approval.'"

"Does that mean if we ask, Jupiter might GIVE approval?" Xian wondered.

Heiku rolled his eyes. "Not likely."

"I think that's all of them," Omaki murmured.

"What about X999.5? Iason has that one," Raoul asked.

"It's the last law in the book," Heiku observed, wryly. "The Syndicate Law."

“Read it,” Raoul sighed. “You know perfectly well I never had the patience to learn the General Code.”

“ ‘X999.5: The Head of the Syndicate shall be Jupiter’s counsel, and is required to report any knowledge of crimes against Amoi and Jupiter; he shall obey all laws and at all times uphold conduct befitting the leader of Tanagura, and as such shall be exalted and enjoy Jupiter’s protections. If he fails in his duties he shall fall from Jupiter’s grace.”

The Blondies fell silent for a few moments, reflecting on this last line.

* * *

For the first time in his life, Iason actually trembled as he approached Jupiter’s sanctum. He could tell by the high hum and her orange-red aura that she was furious. He entered and then, hoping only for mercy, knelt down before her, his head bowed with shame.

Jupiter did not speak, at first. She watched Iason humble himself before her with a mixture of sadness and suspicion, no longer sure if she could trust him, her Iason, the Syndicate Head who above all others, she had loved the most.

“Forgive me,” he whispered, unable to meet her gaze.

“Do you know how much you have disappointed me, Iason?” Jupiter replied.

“I take full responsibility,” he replied, now daring to look up at her. “Do what you will to me. But the others do not deserve so severe a punishment.”

“I have already determined their punishments, and yours.”

“What of their titles, and their estates? And...they wanted me to ask you, what will happen to their households?”

“I should strip you--all of you--of everything you have, and turn you all into mindless sex drones. But to remove the six of you from your offices and powers would throw Amoi into chaos. Your influence and importance extends too far, and the sudden loss of

your services and leadership would be far too disruptive. So I have opted to punish through physical means. Your humiliation and pain will show Amoi that I will not tolerate disobedience, and that I will make no exceptions to my laws. Not even for you."

Iason paused for a moment, lowering his eyes. "You are most gracious; we do not deserve your clemency," he murmured. "But I must ask you. About...my pet?"

"You will surrender him at the end of the year, as we already discussed. But I will make one concession: give him up now, show your obedience to my will, and I will cut your punishment in half. 30 strikes."

"Please," Iason whispered, "I know I do not deserve it. But I'm asking you--no, I'm begging you--let me keep Riki."

"Have I not made myself clear on this point? Then you will not give him up now?"

Iason bowed his head, closing his eyes. "I cannot."

"You can, but you choose not to. You choose to defy me, even now."

"You misunderstand me, Jupiter," Iason protested, standing up to face the sentient computer. "It is not my wish or intent to defy you. But I love Riki. I cannot give him up. Not now, and not in a year."

Jupiter's hum increased in volume and pitch as she reflected on Iason's answer. "Then you may return home and face your punishment tomorrow. And if you refuse to surrender your pet at the end of one year, you will know my full wrath, Iason."

The Blondie frowned at this, but offered Jupiter one final bow before he left, heartbroken.

* * *

"What were you thinking, back there?" Katze demanded, as soon as they left the great hall.

"What? HE'S the one being an ass, and you know it!" Riki retorted.

“He’s still a Blondie, Riki,” Juthian said, gently. “And he’s upset. Didn’t you hear? He’s going to be punished, too.”

“They’re all going to be punished,” Sarius added, grimly. He was worried about his Master, and in that, he wasn’t alone.

Yui was practically in tears. “This can’t be happening,” he whispered. “This is my fault.”

“It’s not your fault, Yui,” Ru argued. “Your Master chose to restore you, even though he knew it was against Jupiter’s law.”

“That’s right,” Katze agreed. “They made their choices, knowing what the consequences would be if they were caught. Unfortunately for them, Jupiter found them out.”

“Of COURSE she found them out,” Riki replied, bitterly. “Are they all complete idiots? Have they forgotten about the rebellion at Dana Burn? I could have told Iason as much, if he had trusted me with his plans.”

“It is odd that they would even consider such a thing,” Katze nodded. “They really underestimated Jupiter.”

“Perhaps they’ve grown too comfortable?” Ru suggested.

“Yes,” Sarius agreed. “That’s exactly it. They’re accustomed to everything going their way. They’ve taken for granted what Jupiter’s given them.”

By some sort of unspoken consensus, the pets and Furniture had all stayed together, gravitating toward Riki’s suite, and now they all gathered around in the seating area there.

“What’s going to happen to us?” Juthian asked.

“I’m not sure,” Katze admitted. “I suppose it depends on whether Jupiter intends to confiscate their assets. If that happens, I hate to say it, but...well, you’ll all be sold.”

As the group reflected on the horror of this possibility, Ru attempted to lighten the mood, smiling. “Well, no sense in worrying about it until we know what’s going to happen. And, if I recall, when Sir Yousi was disciplined, Jupiter allowed him to keep his entire household?

“That’s true,” Sarius nodded. “In fact, didn’t Yousi hire an additional servant?”

“He had to,” Ru remembered. “He needed more assistance...afterwards.”

At this, the group all fell silent.

“Do you think Jupiter will do the same thing to our Masters?” Yui whispered.

“If she does, I’ll personally stick a chain-bomb up her mainframe and blow her to Gardan,” Riki muttered.

“And the rest of us with her,” Katze remarked, wryly.

“I’d just as soon die if that happened to my Master,” Yui proclaimed.

“So would I,” Juthian agreed.

“Well I don’t know about that,” Sarius remarked, “but I confess, I hope I don’t get thrown off to some horrid Master like Elusius Puck.”

The others nodded agreement at this, having heard stories of the Blondie’s notorious cruelty to members of his household.

“What did Raoul mean when he said I’d destroyed Iason?” Riki asked, frowning. “He said it was my fault.”

There was brief silence.

“It’s not your fault, Riki,” Juthian soothed.

“But what did he mean?”

Katze sighed, nodding to let Riki know he intended to answer him. “I don’t know about you, but I could use a smoke. I know Iason doesn’t allow it inside the penthouse but, given the circumstances, I don’t much care about his rules at this point.”

Riki nodded, pulling out his pack of Dark Baccalias. “Want one?”

“Thanks,” Katze nodded.

Riki held the pack out to Kahlan, who took one, gratefully. As the three of them lit up, the others settled down on the comfortable grouping of chairs and sofas, while Ru headed toward Riki’s bar.

“I could use a drink. Anyone else?”

“I’ll take a scotch,” Katze answered.

“Brandy, for me,” Sarius added.

Kahlan nodded. “Brandy sounds good.”

"I'll have...I'll have a cognac," Yui announced, having never consumed any sort of alcohol before and so picking his Master's favorite drink.

"Riki?" Ru prompted.

"Stout."

"You mean to tell me, you have a fully-stocked bar and you're still drinking that piss-water?" Katze demanded.

Riki shrugged. "I tried the other stuff. I just like stout. I've been drinking it since I could spit."

Katze shook his head. "Whatever."

"So, what did Raoul mean?"

"Riki, surely you have some idea?" Katze prompted.

"Not really."

"Well, you're a mongrel. Jupiter never approved of Iason taking you. I know he was reprimanded for it, at least once. But Iason insisted on keeping you--and you've been here nearly three years now."

"So?"

"So, Jupiter doesn't like it. Iason's the Head of the Syndicate--he should be showing off a new pet every year, the way he used to. Instead, he rejected all the Academy pets--the very ones he puts up for auction--and picked you instead, and then kept you."

Daryl, who had been listening from the open door, having just arrived after finding the General Code for the Blondies, nodded.

"It's more than that. Iason takes you, Riki. That's forbidden."

Yui and Juthian exchanged uncomfortable looks at this.

"Forbidden? Is it written in that...Code book thing?"

Daryl shook his head. "I don't think so. I think it's more of a...understanding."

"A social taboo," Sarius clarified.

"But it really isn't fair that Raoul blames you," Ru pointed out. "I think you're right--he's jealous. Everyone knows he's in love with Iason."

Yui bristled at this, his eyes flashing angrily. Ru, realizing his error, blushed.

“He doesn’t love him,” Riki countered. “If he did, he’d care about Iason’s happiness. Raoul only wants Iason because he can’t have him.”

“Do you think so, Riki?” Yui asked, hopefully.

Riki nodded. “Yeah. I know they’re old pairing partners and that stuff never really goes away completely, but I think Raoul just wants to control Iason. He can’t deal with Iason rejecting him for someone else--me especially.”

“That’s probably pretty accurate,” Katze agreed. “Although Raoul was devastated when Iason broke things off, years ago. But it was really Raoul’s fault.” Suddenly realizing he was giving more information than necessary, the eunuch fell silent.

“How was it Raoul’s fault?” Yui demanded.

Katze shrugged. “I don’t know the details,” he hedged, rather dishonestly, “but apparently he paired with someone else. Iason was so disgusted over the whole thing he cut things off completely.”

Riki nodded, catching Katze’s eye, and the two of them shared a knowing look.

Ru brought a tray of drinks and everyone fell silent for a few moments.

“You should be relieved, Yui,” Katze smiled, trying to turn the conversation, “Raoul will be so distracted over all this perhaps you’ll escape being punished over the Puki incident.”

The others laughed at this, especially at the name “Puki,” which for some reason struck them all as particularly funny.

Yui relaxed a little, smiling.

“I can just seem him now, coming into the penthouse all puffed up and indignant,” Sarius laughed, straightening up to imitate the proud little pet. “Master Raoul! My Furniture is most unsatisfactory! He refused to kiss my ass!”

This elicited more snorts and giggles.

Katze held his hand out to Daryl, pulling him onto his lap. “How are they doing in there?” he asked, in a low voice.

“They were actually...laughing, about something.”

“Really? That’s good. They’ve calmed down, then.”

“Am I crashing the party?” Odi asked, leaning against the doorframe to Riki’s room.

Riki motioned him in, nodding towards the bar. “Make yourself a drink.”

“Don’t mind if I do.”

“Odi, were you really going to shoot off Enyu’s foot?” Ru demanded, frowning.

The bodyguard shrugged. “I felt like it.”

“That’s horrible!” Ru protested.

“It’s because of him all this is happening now.”

“That’s not true. I don’t think he even knew about the broadcaster.”

“That’s your view,” Odi replied, wryly.

“I agree with Ru,” Kahlan announced. “Enyu seems like a decent fellow, despite being a Xeronian.”

Ru turned to Kahlan. “What does that mean? You don’t like Xeronians?”

“I only meant...when they’re in their rut, they’ll shag anything that moves. They claim later it’s not rape because they couldn’t help themselves.”

Ru fell silent, studying him for a moment. “I see.”

Kahlan shrugged. “But I mean, Enyu seemed pretty nice.”

“He didn’t know,” Riki remarked, thoughtfully.

Katze smiled. “Oh really? You’re standing up for catboy, Riki?”

“No. It’s just that I don’t think he knew. He was a mean little bastard to me, but I don’t think he would want to hurt Iason.”

“Or Master Omaki,” Ru agreed. “He loves our Master, I’m sure of it.”

“Perhaps I’m mistaken,” Odi conceded. “All I know is, the moment we found that broadcaster, the shit really hit the fan.”

Now a small yellow light above Riki’s door lit up, alerting everyone that the Master of the House had returned.

Riki jumped up, darting out of the room before anyone could stop him.

In the great hall, Iason's entrance was greeted with relief by the Blondies.

"Iason!" Raoul stood up, approaching him with worry in his eyes. "What happened?"

Iason tried to smile, but his headache was now so severe he had trouble even standing.

"What is it? Are you ill? What did she do to you?"

The Blondie shook his head. "Just a little headache, Raoul."

Heiku frowned. "Are you still having those, Iason?"

Toma, taking in the situation, immediately rushed to the pharmacy cabinet in the hall to retrieve some analgesics for him.

Riki passed him, his eyes narrowing when he saw Toma at the pharmacy cabinet.

"Another headache," Toma whispered.

Nodding, the mongrel dashed into the great hall, ignoring Raoul, who glowered at him.

"Come on," he soothed, taking hold of Iason's arm. "Let's get those muscles rubbed out."

"What did Jupiter say?" Omaki asked.

"Did you find out anything about our assets?" Heiku pressed.

"Leave him alone, all of you," Riki snapped. "Can't you see he's in agony?"

Iason allowed Riki to guide him to a chair, seeming glad for his pet's attention. The Blondies, though not particularly happy about being dictated to by the mongrel, realized that he spoke the truth, and they watched, silent, feeling a bit foolish for not taking the initiative to help Iason's suffering.

"Here," Toma whispered, handing Riki an O-6 and a glass of water.

"Have you taken anything for this yet?" Riki asked.

Iason shook his head.

"Then, take this."

Iason did so, but rejected the rest of the water. "Some wine, Riki."

"You can't have any," Riki announced. "Not with that O-6."

Heiku nodded at this, almost imperceptibly, impressed that Riki had the wits to know about the interaction, and the courage to challenge Iason's authority.

But Iason was in no position to argue with anyone, even his own pet. Of all the headaches he'd endured since the Agatha poisoning, this was by far the worst. Riki began rubbing out his shoulders while the others watched, feeling a bit useless.

"I can do that," Raoul offered. "Iason, shall I rub your shoulders for you?"

"No, Raoul. Let Riki do it."

Smiling slightly at this, Riki had the sense not to gloat over Iason's rejection of Raoul, keeping his eyes lowered. He bent down. "Let's go into the bedroom. All right? Let's do this right. With the lights out."

Nodding, Iason rose and allowed his pet to guide him to the Master bedroom.

"Forgive me," he murmured, as he passed the Blondies.

"No no," Heiku protested. "Go lay down. That's precisely what you need."

"Perhaps we should all retire," Omaki suggested. "I could use a good massage myself."

The others nodded their agreement, and so the party broke up.

* * *

Iason sighed, finally in a state of almost complete relaxation, his headache gone and all his tense muscles worked out by Riki's expert touch.

"Feeling better?" Riki whispered, crawling onto the bed next to the Blondie, who was lying face down on the bed.

"Yes, love. I feel perfect."

"Good." Riki lay quietly, not wanting to disturb Iason's hard-won tranquility.

The Blondie opened his eyes, rolling over onto his back. "Come here, love," he whispered.

Riki snuggled up to him, and for a long time they simply lay together, enjoying the comfort of the embrace.

“Iason. Is it true, that it’s because of me all this has happened?”

“Who told you that?”

“Raoul.”

The Blondie sighed. “I shouldn’t tell you this, but I want you to ignore what Raoul says to you. He is jealous of you and wants to hurt you.”

“But is it true?”

“No. What’s at issue is my defiance. I wanted to bring Jupiter down.”

“But why? Is it because of me?”

“Hush.” Iason pushed Riki onto his back and then bent down to kiss him. The mongrel returned this kiss, and then broke away.

“But is it?”

“Don’t concern yourself with such matters.”

Riki frowned at this. “How can you tell me not to be concerned? When you’re about to be publicly whipped? I want to know if it’s because of me!”

“Naughty pet,” the Blondie whispered, bending down to kiss his neck. “What did I just tell you?”

“Stop treating me like a child! Why won’t you answer me?”

“You are still my pet, Riki. As such, you will submit to my decisions. I have decided we are not going to discuss this matter any further.

Riki gave a great sigh of exasperation. “You’re impossible! I hate when you do this, when you shut me out.”

“Riki,” Iason whispered, moving up onto his elbow and stroking his cheek with his other hand. “I want to make love to you now. Get undressed.”

“Why should I? If you’re going to treat me like a naughty pet instead of the man that I am, then perhaps I’ll resist you.”

“Then,” Iason traced a finger along the mongrel’s jawline, then tilted his chin up to face him, “perhaps I shall punish you.”

“Ha! You--”

Riki was silenced when the Blondie's mouth came down on his, hard. Iason had never kissed him in such a fashion before; brutally, passionately, bruising him with his force. He struggled momentarily and then submitted, engaging Iason's demanding tongue with his own, and then they were in each other's arms, rolling around on the bed, exploring each other with wild, almost desperate caresses.

"Get undressed." Iason pulled away and then kissing him again, insistently, fumbling with the zipper of his pants. He managed to unfasten him, slipping a hand around the mongrel's already engorged manhood.

The mongrel gasped, his moan lost in the Blondie's kiss. He reached down, attempting to push his pants from his hips. Iason assisting him in this project, breaking off his kiss long enough to tug off the tight-fitting pants, as Riki took off his tank, tossing it across the room.

Iason paused for a moment, taking in the mongrel's beautiful, naked body. Riki sat up on one elbow, fondling himself with his other hand, his legs slightly spread. The Blondie knelt over him, running both hands down his thighs and then up to his groin, and then across his hips.

Riki lay back down, his eyes smoldering with lust.

"Spread your legs," Iason demanded, and then, wetting a finger in his mouth, prepared the mongrel for entry.

Breathing harder, Riki closed his eyes, holding his erect shaft in one hand. "Please, Iason," he begged. "Take me in your mouth."

The Blondie obliged him, moving down between his legs and pleasuring him, all the while continuing to move his finger seductively inside the mongrel.

Gasping, Riki reached down and placed a hand on Iason's head. "I don't want to come," he whispered, after a moment. "I want to wait."

Iason raised his head, his eyes gleaming. "Should I stop?"

"Yes. I want to try and come...when you're inside me."

"Very well," the Blondie replied, withdrawing his finger. "But first, I want a taste of you." Then, with deliberate drama, he spread

the mongrel's legs apart, pushing his thighs back to access his portal. He bent down, sliding his tongue across Riki's portal and then slipping inside.

"Oh fuck," Riki gasped. "Fuck yes." His eyes rolled back, and he gasped again, and then groaned and arched his back, finally reaching down to place a restraining hand on the Blondie's head. "Stop now. I'm too close."

Iason rose up, so aroused that his erection stood out rigidly from his body. Without a word, he moved up, straddling his pet near his chest, and guiding his cock toward Riki's mouth. "Good boy," he breathed, when Riki eagerly began to pleasure him. He leaned forward, hands on either side of the mongrel's head, and thrust into his mouth, gritting his teeth to keep from climaxing.

After a few moments of this he repositioned himself on top of his pet, spreading his legs open with his knees and probing his entrance with his swollen member.

Riki reached down and helped guide him inside, and Iason slid into his welcoming depths, gasping when the mongrel opened for him, accepting him completely.

"Oh Riki," he moaned, balancing on one hand while he reached down to fondle the mongrel's erection. He withdrew almost to the point of exit, then slowly thrust again, sinking into his pet's pleasant tightness.

Riki, with uncharacteristic boldness, spread the Blondie with his hands and then wiggled a finger inside him as Iason continued to love him.

"Iason," he whispered, his breathing now coming in gasps. "I want to tell you...that I love you."

"Do you, Riki?" Iason's voice broke, betraying his emotion. "Oh pet."

"I don't want you to be punished. I don't want you to be hurt...because of me."

"Riki," Iason sighed, suddenly breaking into his ascent. He began thrusting harder, faster, gasping and grunting as he approached the culmination of his pleasure.

“Oh god,” Riki exclaimed, signaling his own impending release.
“Oh god, yes.”

Then, for the first time, Master and pet climaxed together, uniting in that brief moment in their rapture, each marveling in the sex cries of the other.

* * *

Aki wandered into the kitchen, surprising Tai, who started upon seeing the boy.

“Oh! Aki. Can I get you something?”

“Master says I can have a drink before bed.”

“Ah. Very good. Water, then?”

“Can I have peach juice?”

“What did your Master...that is, Sir Omaki, say you could have?”

“Water,” Aki replied, glumly.

Tai smiled. “Then I think that is what you should have.”

“All right.” The boy took the glass of water and then went back into the great hall, just as Riki crept out of the Master bedroom.

“I’m going to bed,” Aki announced.

“Oh. That’s...nice.”

“Where is Guardian?”

“He’s...asleep. He wasn’t feeling well.”

“Master isn’t feeling well either. Everyone is sick, I guess.”

Riki shrugged. “I guess.” He moved over next to the fire, settling down in Iason’s chair.

“Master usually tells me a story before bed,” Aki hinted.

Riki blinked. “That’s nice.”

“Can I sit on your lap?”

“Um...why?”

“Master always lets me sit on his lap,” Aki answered, walking over to Riki and climbing onto his lap without waiting for further invitation.

“Well...that’s because your Master is a big pervert,” Riki mumbled. “Ahh! You just spilled water on me!”

“Sorry. Here.” Aki handed Riki the glass of water and the mongrel took it, frowning, then set it on the table next to him.

Aki made himself comfortable, snuggling back against the mongrel. “Tell me a story,” he demanded.

“I don’t know any stories.”

“Tell me about you, then. When you were younger.”

“Well,” Riki paused, considering. “I guess I could tell you about...when I was the leader of Bison.”

“What’s Bison?”

“It’s a gang, in Ceres. The slums where I grew up.”

“That sounds good,” Aki encouraged, settling back into his arms. “You were the leader?”

Riki smiled. “Yes. I was...well some people called me the prince of Midas.”

“Prince! So that means everyone did whatever you said?”

“Yes. Pretty much.” Riki closed his eyes, remembering. “Everywhere I went, people would practically bow down. I had all the mongrels kissing my feet.”

“Why would they do that?” Aki wondered, perplexed.

“I don’t mean ACTUALLY kissing my feet. It’s an expression. It means people...well, they respected me.”

“Oh. And,” now Aki yawned, widely, “then what sort of things did you do?”

“Oh, we were always doing something. We liked to play jokes on the Elites and race our bikes, play billiards and just hang out at the beach. Other times we, well...I guess I shouldn’t tell you this.”

“Tell me what?” the boy asked, eagerly.

“We would do...I suppose you could say...naughty things.”

“Like what?”

“Well, we had to steal in order to survive. So we were always in trouble with the Police.”

“Would they chase you?”

“Shit yeah. But we’d get away, most of the time.”

“But not always, then.”

“Not always. And it really sucked when we DID get caught. Those Midas Police are mean fuckers.”

“This is a good story,” Aki announced. “But what happened? How come you’re not the prince of Midas anymore?”

Riki fell silent, frowning.

“How did you become Guardian’s pet?” Aki pressed.

“Aki.” Omaki walked into the hall, looking annoyed. “I told you to get a drink and then come right to bed.”

“Riki is telling me a story,” Aki protested.

“Yes, I heard. Now mind me. Off to bed. Now.”

Pouting, Aki slid off Riki’s lap, turning to give him a parting smile. “Thanks for telling me a story.”

“Sure,” Riki answered.

“Will you tell me the rest sometime?”

“If you like.” Riki smiled at the boy, reaching out to pat his head. “Good dreams.”

“Okay.”

Aki followed Omaki out of the hall, and Riki sat for a moment, staring at the fire. Telling Aki about his life as the leader of Bison had depressed him, and he struggled with his feelings. Riki the Dark, the slum lord of Ceres, was gone, his life nothing more now than a legend. Now Riki realized, with complete certainty, that he would never return to Midas. He wondered if Iason remembered his promise to build an Academy in the slums.

Now Guy pressed into his thoughts, and then, though he tried to repress it, Kei. He had done his best not to think about what had happened that day at Dana Burn, but now he realized that he had to do something. Guy was probably still frantically looking for Kei.

He glanced over at the communications center, his gaze shifting to the drawer where Iason kept various punishment implements and other things. He had a hunch Kei’s handheld and pendant were in the drawer. The great penthouse was quiet, all the Blondies having retired to their private quarters, and Iason was still asleep.

Realizing his opportunity, he crept over to the communicators center and popped open the drawer. There, among the various paddles and straps, he found what he was looking for. The pendant, and Kei's handheld phone. He seized both of them, quietly shutting the drawer and then stepping out onto the balcony.

The night was cold and windy. The mongrel shivered, lighting up a smoke to at least warm his hands. He flipped open the phone. The screen was blinking with hundreds of missed calls, but the device appeared to be set to mute. He cycled through Kei's contacts until he found the single word he hoped for: Guy.

Shaking a bit, both from the cold and his anxiety, he placed the outgoing beacon, surprised when Guy immediately picked up.

"Kei? Kei! Is that you?"

"No," Riki replied. "It's not Kei."

A slight pause and then, "Riki?"

"Yeah."

"Where's Kei? Why are you using his handheld?"

"Kei's gone, Guy."

"Gone where? Where is he? Riki!"

"I'm sorry. It was...an accident. I wanted to call you before. But...I couldn't."

"What are you saying?" Guy's voice choked with emotion, his worst fears suddenly realized. "Let me talk to him!"

"You can't talk to him. He's gone."

"Where is he?" Guy screamed.

"His body...is in the sea," Riki answered. "I'll send you his pendant. I'm sorry, Guy. Goodbye."

"Riki!"

The mongrel cut the connection, and then, after considering it for a moment, threw the phone over the ledge. He stuffed the pendant in his pants pocket, just as Iason came out onto the balcony, wearing his heavy, silk-lined robe.

"It's too cold outside, Riki," he scolded. "Come inside."

"Yeah all right. I was just finishing my smoke."

"I heard you talking to someone."

“Talking? Oh...no, I was...I was just...um...composing a poem. About the...night.”

Iason smiled at this. “A poem? Let me hear it.”

Riki shook his head. “No, it’s stupid.”

The Blondie moved behind him, opening his robe to wrap Riki inside it, against his body. “Tell me, pet.”

Glad for the warmth of Iason’s body, Riki sighed. “Um...okay. The poem. It’s silly. Um. It’s:

Night

Crystal specs of light

Pierce the moonless sky

Unable to warm my soul

The cold penetrates and bites

Like a cock up a virgin’s hole.”

At this, Iason threw his head back and laughed.

“I told you it was stupid,” Riki shrugged.

“You shall always be a mongrel,” Iason replied, tenderly, kissing his temple.

“Yeah, well. You like me that way.”

“Come inside now, I told you. It’s cold.”

“All right.” Riki tossed his smoke over the ledge.

“I want you in bed with me. I can’t sleep, when you’re not there.”

“What did you do, before I came along?”

“I didn’t sleep,” Iason confessed, smiling.

“Hmmm. Sounds like you NEED me, then.”

“Yes. I need you, pet. Very much.” The Blondie shut his eyes tight, holding Riki close, just as Ios peeked over the horizon, beginning his ascent into the night sky.

* * *

Jupiter’s Eve dawned cold but clear, the sky a pale shade of blue. Tai had stayed up half the night cooking the morning meal, determined that, at the very least, the day would begin pleasantly.

The dining table was laid out festively, a variety of dishes steaming under covered domes, surrounded by wreaths of pine branches and Amoian holly, as the Blondies straggled into the hall, one after the other.

“I don’t think I slept a wink,” Heiku groaned, holding out his coffee cup when Tai rushed toward him to fill it.

“Nor I,” Raoul replied.

“You didn’t sleep,” Yousi observed, looking at Heiku, “because you kept wanting to have sex.”

Xian snorted at this, and Heiku shrugged, smiling. “Can I help it? I finally had you back in my bed.”

“I slept,” Omaki remarked. “Though I had a horrible dream.”

“The food looks good, anyway,” Xian remarked, and the others nodded their agreement.

“Have you any tea?” Megala asked, smearing a generous dollop of honey onto a breakfast roll.

“Yes, Lord Chi. Right away.” Tai brought the Blondie an entire teapot, setting it down within his easy reach.

Iason emerged from the bath hall, having showered and dressed in one of his finest outfits, as though he were prepared to attend a party.

“Iason,” Heiku announced, between bites of bacon and spinach omelet, “I’ll give you one million credits for your chef.”

“Two million,” Xian challenged.

“You don’t have two million,” Heiku retorted.

“I beg your pardon! Since when are you privy to my personal finances?”

“I’ll give you three million, then.”

Iason smiled. “Forgive me, but I am not prepared to part with Tai at this time.”

“It’s not fair,” Heiku protested. “You have the best chef on Amoi. You ought to at least loan him out to us.”

Tai beamed at this praise, taking it as an affirmation that his efforts had not gone to waste.

“Did you sleep, Iason?” Raoul asked.

“Yes, quite well, actually.”

“Hmmm.” Raoul was a bit surprised at this, since he knew how lightly his former lover slept. “Must have been the pharmaceuticals.”

Iason refrained from contradicting him, sitting down at the breakfast table as though nothing extraordinary was about to happen.

“So, your headache is gone?” Heiku pressed.

“Yes yes. I’m quite all right, this morning.”

“Then, perhaps you’ll tell us now what Jupiter said?” Raoul hinted.

“We’re all very lucky,” Iason replied. “We’re to keep our titles and our estates. And our households.”

This announcement was greeted with sighs of relief and smiles.

“However, the whippings will proceed, as scheduled.”

Omaki nodded, though he had privately hoped Iason might have been able to work some of his magic on Jupiter to lighten their sentences.

“Even yours, Iason?” Raoul whispered. He, too, had nourished the hope that Iason might have somehow persuaded Jupiter to reduce his punishment.

“Jupiter offered to reduce my strikes to 30,” Iason said, avoiding eye contact with Raoul, “but I could not give her what she asked for.”

Raoul darkened at this, his anger already rising. “And why not? What is it she asked for, that you couldn’t give?”

“Jupiter asked that I give up Riki.”

Raoul pounded the table with his fist. “Dammit, Iason! Why didn’t you agree?”

Now Iason met his gaze. “Because I love Riki. I’d sooner give part of my body, than give him up.”

Raoul leapt to his feet, furious. “That’s exactly what you’ll be giving! You’ll be lucky to survive this; Iason! I’ve held that whip a thousand times myself! Even 30 strikes would be agony--and you’re going to take 60! It’s unspeakable!”

“You might want to reconsider,” Heiku pressed, gently. “You’re going to have to give him up eventually, anyway. Isn’t that right?”

“I’ll deal with that day when it comes. Raoul, sit down.”

“You don’t know what you’re saying. You’ll be halfway through your punishment, begging for mercy, and Jupiter won’t give it to you.”

“I’m sorry to intrude,” Commander Khosi said, as he made his way into the hall. “I see you’re having a private conversation of some importance, but I confess I’m quite famished, and this food looks absolutely splendid.”

“You’re not intruding, Vosh. Please, sit down. Raoul, you too.” Iason replied.

Raoul took his seat, scowling.

The Commander smiled, his gaze flitting from one Blondie to the next. Although he had been tempted the previous day to intervene when he heard yelling in the great hall, he had decided that, as a guest, it was more appropriate that he should stay in his quarters and let the Blondies work out their differences. He had been curious as to the nature of their disagreement, but it was not until now, having overheard part of their conversation, that he had any idea as to what they were arguing about.

He sat down, holding up his cup for Tai to fill with coffee.

“I couldn’t help but overhear,” he began, delicately. “Are you in some sort of trouble, Iason?”

The Blondie sighed, nodding. “We’re all in trouble, Commander. We...this is rather embarrassing to confess, but...in fact, we had been toying with the possibility of removing Jupiter from power. But, as fate has it, Jupiter learned of our plans. We’re to be punished today.”

Voshka listened, frowning. “Punished?”

“Publicly whipped.”

“My. How barbaric.”

Omaki nodded. “Agreed.”

“We’re all slated for whippings, but Iason is to take 60 strikes,” Heiku added.

The Commander was a bit surprised at this, his brown furrowing with concern. "Sixty, Iason?"

The Blondie nodded.

"That's quite severe," Voshka murmured, thinking for a moment. "I could offer you asylum, if you like? On Alpha Zen? We can leave immediately."

The Blondies fell silent as the implications of this offer sunk in.

"We'd have to leave Amoi permanently," Heiku mused.

"As for myself, I'm not going to run away from my punishment," Raoul announced, proudly.

"That's easy for you to say. You're not facing 25 or 60 strikes," Omaki remarked.

Raoul considered this, nodding. "Point taken."

Iason felt tempted by the Commander's offer. He would be beyond Jupiter's reach, assured of having Riki with him. But like Raoul, he didn't like the idea of shirking his punishment. He felt, as Head of the Syndicate, he ought to face whatever Jupiter had in store for him.

"Your planet is too bloody cold for me," Xian proclaimed.

Voshka nodded, his gaze shifting back to Iason. "What about you, Iason?"

"Your offer is appreciated, Vosh. But I can't leave now. I have...an obligation. I'll take my punishment."

A bit disappointed, yet secretly admiring the Blondie for his resolve, the Commander nodded. "Understood. The offer still stands, should you ever change your mind."

"I'll be staying, as well," Omaki added. He had privately hoped Iason might take the Commander up on his offer; it would have been easier, then, to accept the offer as well, and leave Amoi, taking Aki with him.

"As will I," Heiku nodded.

Voshka sighed. "Megala?"

The Blondie looked startled at being directly addressed. "Oh! No, I...have too much unfinished business, Commander," he explained.

“I don’t want to go to another planet,” Yousi announced. “It would be too confusing.”

Heiku leaned over and kissed Yousi on the cheek. “You’re not going anywhere without me, anyway.”

“I have to go some places without you,” Yousi observed. “Private places, I mean.”

“Ah. Very well. I shall make some exceptions,” the Blondie replied, smiling.

“Megala! Can I borrow your bag?” Xian teased. “I left mine at home.”

“What on earth is that noise?” Raoul demanded, looking toward the window.

“I’ve been wondering that myself,” Heiku replied.

Toma rushed over to the window and then stopped, stunned. “Oh my.”

“What is it?” Iason demanded.

“It’s...traffic.”

“Traffic?”

The Blondies stared at one another in confusion.

“And...hovercrafts. And crowds of people, down below the tower.”

“Oh hell,” Heiku groaned. “It’s started.”

In fact, Tanagura was in a state of chaos. The scheduled Public Whippings of the six renowned Blondies had been announced on Jupiter’s news portals the night before, and throughout the night the traffic had steadily increased, as scores of curious onlookers from Midas and Urus poured into the grand metropolis of the Elites. The Tanagura Police was forced to send out its entire force, including aircraft, to try and stem steady migration into the city. But already the streets were completely gridlocked, and the area around the Plaza, where the whippings were to take place, blocked off by a legion of the Amoian Guard.

Unable to get into the Plaza to view the whippings, crowds had resorted to standing outside the Eos Tower, hoping to at least get a glimpse of the Blondies as they were escorted to their fates.

“It’s a circus,” Raoul muttered, bitterly. “And this is Jupiter’s Eve at the opening of the Trade Convention. Half the people will be in costumes for the masque.”

“We’ll, at least we’re famous,” Heiku replied.

“Infamous, more precisely,” Omaki corrected.

“It’s part of the punishment,” Iason said, softly. “Jupiter wants us humiliated.”

“Hey! Why didn’t you wake me up?” Riki demanded, sauntering into the hall, wearing only a pair of unzipped pants.

“Riki,” Iason scolded. “That’s hardly appropriate attire in front of our guests.”

“Hmmm?” Riki stretched, arching his back and showing off his fabulous chest and arms, which he kept sculpted through a daily regimen of pushups and chest presses.

“Quite appropriate, in my view,” Voshka countered, winking at the mongrel.

“Riki, the others are waiting for you in the breakfast nook,” Tai whispered.

Riki frowned at this. “The breakfast nook? Where the fuck is that?”

Tai smiled, pointing toward the little used room down the hallway, next to the library.

“Why can’t I eat right here?” he demanded.

“Because you’re not an Elite,” Raoul snapped. “Do you see any mongrels at the table? And I quite agree with Iason. You can’t waltz around half-naked. It’s highly disrespectful.”

“Waltzing. And gallivanting.” Heiku teased, eliciting a series of snickers and snorts from Xian.

“And scalawaging,” Omaki added.

“I must concur with the good Blondie,” Voshka purred. “I much prefer pets walking around completely naked.”

Riki frowned, his brow furrowed. “What’s that noise?”

“It’s the sound of a thousand vultures, come to feed on the dead,” Omaki replied, wryly.

“Huh?”

“Riki. Come here and give me a kiss.”

His pet leaned forward dutifully and pecked the Blondie on his cheek.

“Now. Get dressed and go eat your breakfast with the others.” Iason gave him a warning look.

“Whatever. Yeah. Sure.” The mongrel shrugged, leaving the great hall.

Anders, who had been standing by the wall, watching the Blondies through uninterested eyes, suddenly received an incoming beacon on his communicator. He flipped it open, reading the message with a mixture of surprise and excitement.

“Commander.” He stepped forward, whispering into the Commander’s ear.

Voshka suddenly stood up, the blood rushing from his face. “Gentlemen. I fear I must make a sudden departure. I have just received some news which requires urgent action.”

Iason frowned. “I hope everything is all right, Commander?”

“Yes. I believe so. Only, I must leave. At once. Please forgive me. And...ah...Iason. About the trade convention. Alpha Zen considers Amoi her preferred trading partner. All former exchange is to be fully restored.”

Iason smiled. “Very good. Jupiter will be pleased about that, at any rate.”

“You’re leaving just like that?” Omaki pressed.

“Yes, I do apologize. I know...this is an awkward time for you. I should be here but, it’s just, I’ve learned there’s been an uprising on Aristia, and the matter is of some personal interest to me.”

“Are you quite sure?” Iason asked. “We would have received some sort of news from Aristia, surely.”

“Actually, I heard about that uprising myself, the other day, Iason,” Xian remarked. “There was a massacre at the palace at Arubia.”

“Perhaps you should check your communications relay, Iason,” Heiku suggested. “I received that message, too.”

“How very odd.” Iason shook his head, puzzled.

Tai watched the unfolding scene nervously, backing away from the table as discreetly as he could.

“So. It has been a pleasure. Iason,” Voshka gave the Blondie a little bow, his gaze then flicking to Omaki. “Lord Ghan.”

“A pleasure, indeed,” Omaki smiled.

“And the rest of you. My offer still stands.” Bowing again, the Commander turned sharply on his heels and strode from the hall, with Anders at his side.

Heiku puzzled over the Commander’s hasty exit. “Why does he care what happens on Aristia?”

“Wasn’t there another massacre on Aristia? Years ago?” Omaki remembered.

“Yes,” Iason nodded. “It must have something to do with that. My understanding is the Commander’s men were responsible for it.”

A loud explosion startled everyone.

“Good gracious! What was that?” Omaki demanded.

Heiku pointed to the window. “Fireworks, it seems.”

Omaki laughed. “At 8:00 in the morning?”

“They’re treating this like some kind of festival,” Raoul grumbled.

“Iason. Those pills you took last night. Have you any others?” Heiku asked.

“Ah. Yes. I have plenty.”

“Good. Let me have a look at your pharmacy, and I’ll see what I can come up with. It won’t have much effect after a certain point, but we might at least be able to take the edge off things. We should have everything ready; it’s going to be a rough couple of days for all of us, especially you.”

Iason nodded, rising from the table. “Good idea. I’ll show you.”

* * *

Riki arrived at the breakfast nook, standing in the doorway with a confused look on his face.

“I thought this was a closet,” he murmured.

Daryl smiled. “Master Iason never uses this room now, but he used to, when I first came to the penthouse.”

Katze nodded. “I spent many a lonely meal here.”

“The view is nice,” Riki remarked, walking toward the window. “But what the hell is going on down there? And were those fireworks I heard? And look! Hover-birds.”

“They’ve been coming in all night long,” Sarius replied. “Didn’t you hear the traffic?”

“No. I just woke up.”

“Apparently the summons was broadcast late last night, and the whole city just turned upside down. I heard on the gossip channel that the Police have blocked off all the roads flowing into Tanagura, but they can’t seem to stop people from getting in via bikes or hovercraft. They were swarming in last night from Midas but now they’re coming in all the way from Urus.”

“You mean to see the Blondies get whipped?”

“Yep. Traffic has come to a complete standstill in the city and the Police have called in reinforcements from Midas to control the pickpockets and looters.”

“I wish this day was over,” Juthian whispered.

“Me too,” Yui agreed. “Every time I think about it I get sick.”

Riki sat down at the table, loading his plate with eggs, bacon and hotcakes, saying nothing.

“It’s going to be horrible,” Ru murmured, shuddering.

Katze nodded. “Yes. But they’ll get through it.”

Katze, Daryl, and Juthian exchanged knowing looks, each of them having some idea as to what the Blondies were facing.

“Here’s the thing,” Katze continued. “They’re going to need us, the next few days. For Iason and Omaki, and maybe Heiku, it may be longer. Afterwards I think we should bring them all back here, and that way we can work together to take care of them.”

The others all nodded at this.

“Good idea,” Ru agreed.

“So, Riki. Your appetite doesn’t seem to be spoiled any,” Kahlan remarked.

Riki shrugged. “Yeah. I never turn down a good meal.”

“Is that so?” Katze smiled. “I seem to remember you had a different view, when you first came to Eos.”

The mongrel blinked, and then smiled, remembering his three-day hunger strike when he was first brought into Iason’s penthouse. “That was a long time ago.”

“Not so long,” Katze replied, softly.

Ru stood up. “I’ll help clear these plates.”

“I’ll help, too,” Kahlan offered.

Riki covered his plate with his hands protectively. “I just started here.”

Juthian turned to Yui, who was staring down at his lap, blinking back tears. “Have you seen the gardens here, Yui? They’re very nice.”

Yui shook his head.

“Come on, I’ll show you.”

“I’m going, too,” Sarius announced.

“I’d better go see if the Blondies need anything,” Daryl said, rising.

“You’re all deserting me!” Riki protested.

“I’ll stay with you,” Katze replied. “I’m too bloody tired to move.”

Once the others had left, Riki turned to Katze. “I wanted to ask you a favor, anyway.”

“Oh? Go ahead and ask. No promises.”

“Dickhead!”

Katze smiled. “Is that a wise stance to take when embarking on a favor-asking project? Calling me by such a name?”

“I was just teasing.”

“I know.”

Now Riki leaned toward Katze, lowering his voice. “Actually, this is kind of important. I need you to run an errand for me. To...return something.” He reached into his pants pocket and pulled

out the Kei's pendant, handing it to him. "Can you return it? To Guy?"

Katze looked at the pendant in his hand, frowning. "You've kept a love token all this time?"

Riki shook his head. "It's not what you think. But...it's important. He needs it."

"All right. I don't know when I'll have a chance--I imagine I'll be over at the trade convention center all week. With Iason and Raoul both out of commission for the next few days, I'll have a lot of matters to attend to."

"Okay. As soon as you can though, all right?"

Katze nodded, shoving the pendant into his jacket pocket.

* * *

The Plaza was packed with bystanders. Most of them were Elites, though a few non-Elites had managed to claim a space in the early hours of the morning. Amoian Guards surrounded the Plaza, preventing anyone else from entering the overcrowded square in front of the Emporium.

At the fringes of the spectacle, vendors took advantage of the crowds and set up stands to distribute food, drinks, sparklers, balloons, holo-cameras, and--the most popular item of all--zoom binoculars. It was Jupiter's Eve, at the opening of the Amoian Intergalactic Trade Convention, five hours before the Annual Masque, which was to be held at the Emporium. People came to the Public Whipping already in costume, determined to include the punishment of the Blondie Elite in their planned festivities for the day. Their elaborate, glittering costumes and masks gave the scene a surreal quality, as though the scheduled whippings were part of some grand, absurd play.

A tent had been set up for the privacy of the Blondies, a concession that was granted them out of respect. A second dispensation given them was that the Blondies, unlike pets who were whipped, were not exposed to the humiliation of complete

nudity. They were stripped to the waist, but wore loose-fitting, silken pants and boots.

The Blondie that had been summoned to administer the whippings was Xanthus Kahn, known throughout Amoi for his incredible strength. He was the most feared of any Blondie when it came to public whippings, revered even more than Raoul, who was a second favorite among those who enjoyed such spectacles. But today, Raoul would not be the one holding a whip.

Xanthus paced the stage, cracking his whip as he readied himself for the task he faced. It would challenge even his strength and endurance, to whip six Blondies. He would administer a total of 135 strikes. In all his days as a disciplinarian, he had never even whipped another Blondie, and now he was to punish six of the most highly regarded Elites in Amoian society.

The Blondie had pushed his personal feelings aside when summoned by Jupiter for the task; for, in truth, he had nothing but the highest respect for Iason and Raoul, and for Xian--who he even considered to be a friend. And though he and Heiku had never warmed to one another, he did not wish him harm, nor did he want to see the great Blondie suffer, as he knew he most certainly would. The other Blondies, Megala and Omaki, he knew by reputation alone, though they had all gone to the Academy together.

Upon receiving word of the disciplinary summons, Xanthus, like many others that day, had been shocked to learn of the conspiracy and the planned revolt against Jupiter. He would never have imagined that Iason Mink, who had enjoyed Jupiter's favor more than any other Blondie, would repay that favor with subversion and seditious rebellion. And yet Xanthus also understood that Iason had fallen in love with his pet, and in that, he and the disgraced Blondie were not so dissimilar, for Xanthus, too, loved his own pet Golarian.

But whatever reason had driven Iason and the others to turn against Jupiter, it was now his duty to see that they were punished. He would not hold back; they would feel the full force of his arm,

though privately the Blondie was worried especially about what was in store for Iason Mink, and how he would endure what was coming.

Xian was the first to be escorted onto the stage. For a moment, their gazes locked and Xanthus thought he saw his old friend flinch upon recognizing him. His heart went out to Xian, and he was glad that the Blondie was only to endure 5 strikes.

Xian was manacled to the whipping post, his arms and legs spread, while Xanthus paced behind him, reciting in his mind the sentence he had memorized.

The crowd, which earlier had been deafening, now fell silent, the hush somehow even louder.

“Xian Sami,” Xanthus announced, stopping behind the Blondie with his hands on his hips, “you have been found in violation of Section X998.5 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 5 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment. You have the option of Acceleration. Do you choose Acceleration, or reject it?”

“I accept,” Xian replied.

“Very well.” With that, the Blondie paced for a few more seconds, then threw back his arm and let the whip fly with a deafening crack, hitting the Blondie full-force across his back.

“One!” The strikes were announced by Kobin, a Blondie with a particularly deep, menacing voice, who stood at the back of the stage, arms across his chest.

Xian’s hands closed into fists as he fought the overwhelming pain of the whip, and before he could fully recover, the second strike sliced into his skin.

“Two!”

On strike three his eyes rolled back, and on strikes four and five, he could no longer hold back, his agonized cry breaking through the silence.

His sentence carried out, Xian was released from his bonds and taken into the tent.

Next came Megala Chi, the smallest of the Blondies, who cringed when he beheld Xanthus Kahn, blood dripping from his

whip. He was manacled to the whipping post as Xanthus paced the stage behind him.

“Megala Chi,” Xanthus bellowed. “You have been found in violation of Section A1048 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 10 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment. You have the option of Acceleration. Do you choose Acceleration, or reject it?”

“Reject,” Megala replied, meekly.

“Very well.”

Unlike Xian, Megala was unable to hold back, crying out from the very first strike. Blood streamed from the whip gashes in his back; it seemed an interminable amount of time before all ten strikes were delivered. At the last strike, Megala let out an agonized scream that seemed to linger even after he was removed from the stage.

Next Raoul was brought out onto the stage, his immense, muscular arms spread wide above his head and manacled, and then his ankles. Xanthus was surprised to note what appeared to be faint whip marks in the Blondie’s back, and he puzzled over this, again pacing behind him as he shook out his arm and prepared to begin again.

“Raoul Am. You have been found in violation of Sections F214 and X998.5 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 15 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment. You have the option of Acceleration. Do you choose Acceleration, or reject it?”

“I accept.”

Xanthus paused for a moment, a bit surprised at this answer. “Very well,” he replied, flipping the whip into Acceleration mode. As he began to whip the Blondie who had himself been known as a fearsome disciplinarian, the crowd began to count along with Kobin.

“Five!”

“Six!”

“Seven!”

Raoul, gritting his teeth in agony, at last cried out openly.

“Eight!”

The Blondie’s tortured scream stayed Xanthus for a moment. He moved forward, speaking in a low voice so only Raoul could hear. “Shall I disengage the Acceleration?”

“No,” Raoul whispered, his vanity preventing him from making a more rational choice. “I don’t want scars.”

Sighing, Xanthus turned around to face the crowd, his hands on his hips and legs spread wide. “This is not a sport at which you may cheer!” he bellowed. “You may not count the strikes! You will be silent during these proceedings, or you will be REMOVED from the Plaza!”

A hushed silence settled over the square at this. In the distance, the hum of hovercraft and the angry blaring of horns in stopped traffic reminded everyone there that they were fortunate to have gained admittance into the Plaza.

Xanthus turned around and resumed the whipping, frowning when the body of the Blondie began to shake under the final strikes of his whip. Raoul no longer even tried to restrain his screams; the pain was ungodly, completely unbearable and beyond anything he’d imagined possible.

Despite the cold, Xanthus had now broken out into a sweat, and so as Raoul was taken from the stage and Heiku chained to the whipping post, he stripped down to his waist, his upper body bare and glistening with his sweat. The Blondie had an exceptional physique, with immense, muscular shoulders and arms and a broad chest. A tattooed dragon-beast covered one arm, his striking arm, seeming to move as his muscles flexed. He wore his hair in a single long braid, wrapped with cords of leather from his neck down to his waist.

Heiku’s body was also exceptional, and the spellbound crowd gaped at the Blondie’s bionic prosthesis, which extended past his shoulders, the metal workings seeming to blend into his back.

Golarian rushed onto the stage to offer his Master a drink of water, and the Blondie accepted it, draining the container. He

stretched his arm and then cracked the whip, rolling his shoulders in preparation for Heiku's 20 strikes.

"Heiku Quiahtenon," he announced, finally. "You have been found in violation of Sections C107, F214.5, and X998.5 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 20 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment. You have the option of Acceleration. Do you choose Acceleration, or reject it?"

"Accept."

Shaking his head slightly, the Blondie then stepped back, whipping his arm back and giving the Blondie a hard strike.

"One!"

CRACK!

"Two!"

CRACK!

"Three!"

CRACK!

"Four!"

CRACK!

"Five!"

CRACK!

"Six!"

CRACK!

"Seven!"

Now Heiku, who had been straining against his restraints, let out an anguished wail, his cries nearly drowning Kobin's impassive count of each strike. Xanthus paused at the tenth strike to give the Blondie the option of disengaging Acceleration, but like Raoul, Heiku refused, too proud of his beautiful body to allow it to be permanently scarred.

"Seventeen!"

CRACK!

"Eighteen!"

CRACK!

"Nineteen!"

CRACK!

“Twenty!”

Heiku, during the last few strikes, lost consciousness, and had to be carried from the stage.

There was a slight pause as the stage floor was wiped of the Blondie’s blood. Now only Omaki Ghan and Iason Mink remained; but their punishment would be the most severe. Omaki was escorted to the whipping post and there shackled.

A renegade hovercraft attempted to fly in close to the Plaza but was cut off by the Tanagurian air patrol. Xanthus waited until the situation was under control and then proceeded.

“Omaki Ghan. You have been found in violation of Sections C107 and X999 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 25 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment. You have the option of Acceleration. Do you choose Acceleration, or reject it?”

“I accept Acceleration.”

“Very well.”

Omaki could hear the Blondie pacing behind him, and he braced himself for the first strike. When the whip cut into his flesh, he gasped, suddenly realizing, with complete horror, the agony that was in store for him.

CRACK!

“One!”

CRACK!

“Two!”

CRACK!

“Three!”

CRACK!

“Four!”

CRACK!

“Five!”

CRACK!

“Six!”

CRACK!

“Seven!”

He closed his eyes, trying to transport himself away from the anguish, not even realizing that he had begun to cry out. He strained futilely against his restraints, desperate to escape the searing heat of the whip.

“Nine!”

CRACK!

“Ten!”

CRACK!

At first he wasn't even aware that Xanthus had stopped, he was so disoriented from the pain.

Then he heard the Blondie's low voice.

“Shall I disengage the Acceleration?”

Not quite comprehending at first, Omaki then realized what Xanthus had asked. “Yes,” he whispered, no longer caring that his body would forever carry the scars of his shame; all he wanted now was some attenuation of the horrific pain of the whip.

Even without acceleration, the whipping was brutal, and the Blondie drifted in and out of consciousness toward the end, his mind focusing on the counting of the strikes and yet unable to comprehend or remember what order numbers came in, or when he could expect the suffering to end.

Like Heiku, he was carried from the stage, in such pain that he did not even realize the whipping had ceased. As he was brought into the tent, he caught a glimpse of Iason, who looked down at him, frowning, before suddenly disappearing from view.

Iason moved out onto the stage, letting his cloak fall from his shoulders. The air was cold against his bare skin, and he shivered. Xanthus regarded him with a look of pity and worry. The Blondie held out his arms to be manacled above his head, stretched out in a great V, his legs spread and ankles shackled to the floor of the stage.

Xanthus moved forward to speak to him in a low voice. “I cannot offer you the option of disengaging Acceleration, Iason. I am sorry. At 60 strikes, it is necessary, for your safety.”

“I understand,” Iason replied.

The Blondie stepped back behind him, pausing for a moment before beginning.

“Iason Mink. You have been found in violation of Sections C107, X999 and X999.5 of the General Code. You have been sentenced to 60 strikes with this whip, and you will now receive that punishment.”

Iason closed his eyes, moving into a meditative state. He felt the whip, heard Kobin’s voice in the distance, even felt the pain, yet remained removed from the experience.

For the first 10 strikes.

“Eleven!”

CRACK!

“Twelve!”

CRACK!

“Thirteen!”

CRACK!

“Fourteen!”

CRACK!

“Fifteen!”

CRACK!

Unlike the other Blondies, Iason had not uttered a sound, even after 15 strikes. But then, as the whipping continued, he could no longer ignore the agony that began to build, pressing into his consciousness. His body quivered and twitched and then, without even realizing he had done so, at last he began to cry out, his anguish no longer hidden.

Raoul watched Iason’s whipping from the tent, though he remained lying on a cot, feeling useless, cringing with every strike.

But it was Riki who suffered the most. When Iason began to vocalize his anguish, his pet pulled at his own hair, beside himself with grief and worry. And then, like a blinding flash that burned into his mind, the mongrel had a glimpse of Iason’s agony, as though somehow the Blondie had pressed into his thoughts. For a brief moment, their minds were as one, and Riki felt Iason’s despair, his spiraling confusion and misery.

Unable to bear it any longer, he rushed out onto the stage, standing before Iason.

“Stop! He can’t take any more!”

“Pet!” Xanthus yelled, “Get off the stage at once!”

“I’ll take his punishment,” Riki announced, throwing off his jacket and then pulling off his tank. “I’ll be his…proxy.”

Xanthus paused, admiring the pet for his courage and loyalty. “You cannot take his place, pet. There is no precedent for it.”

“Actually there is a precedent for it.” Headmaster Konami, who had watched the whippings of his former students with sorrow and disbelief, stood in the front of the crowd, arms across his chest. “Erphanes stood in for his brother Ios and took twenty lashes after the battle of Arman.”

“That’s legend,” Xanthus argued.

“No. It’s a fact,” the Headmaster corrected, “recorded in the Desert Chronicles. You have a precedent, if the pet is willing to take his Master’s punishment, he ought to be allowed to do so.”

Xanthus walked to the edge of the stage, crouching down to confer with the Headmaster. After a few moments, he stood up.

“Very well, pet. You may stand in for your Master.”

Iason, who was drifting in and out of consciousness, was taken down from the whipping post. The manacles were set too high for Riki and had to be lowered before the pet could be shackled. Then Xanthus proceeded to whip the mongrel, beginning with the 28th strike.

CRACK!

“Twenty eight!”

CRACK!

“Twenty nine!”

CRACK!

“Thirty!”

From the tent, Raoul watched with disbelief as the mongrel he had despised for so long, who he had only sought to harm and humiliate, did what he himself was unable to do--save Iason. And Riki, unlike the Blondies, was being whipped without any sort of

pharmaceutical buffer to help moderate the pain, and with Acceleration, for Xanthus, distracted by the pet's unexpected request, had not disengaged it. The mongrel's screams tore into the Blondie's heart, and effected a permanent change in his attitude toward Riki.

Now, for the first time, rather than a mongrel, he saw a man--a powerful, strong man--who had sacrificed himself for the one he loved. In this he had earned Raoul's respect, and once won, it would never be lost again.

Iason stirred, his eyes flickering open, the sound of the mongrel's cries piercing his consciousness. "Riki?" he whispered.

"You're dreaming," Raoul soothed. "Riki is fine."

But Riki was far from being fine. He had stood in for his Iason at the 28th strike, and so was to endure 32 brutal lashes, with no pain relief, and no one to step in for him. The crowd watched the pet's whipping, spellbound, admiring his loyalty and his resolve--for not once did Riki beg for the suffering to end, though his anguished screams sent shivers through all who stood there.

"Thirty six!"

CRACK!

"Thirty seven!"

CRACK!

"Thirty eight!"

CRACK!

"Thirty nine!"

CRACK!

"Forty!"

And then, in a great flash of white light, with a mighty hum, came an apparition that no one could have anticipated.

Jupiter.

Materializing for the first time outside her private sanctuary, Jupiter held out her hand to halt Xanthus.

The Blondie, dumbstruck at seeing Jupiter levitating before him, knelt down on one knee, bowing, his whip falling from his hand onto the stage.

“This pet shall suffer no more,” Jupiter proclaimed. “And for his courage and loyalty, he will be rewarded with full citizenship. He is now A-107M, a pet of the highest ranking, entitled to all the rights of a citizen of Tanagura.”

With that, Jupiter vanished, sending a ripple of shocked excitement through the crowd. Riki, only vaguely aware of Jupiter’s appearance, was taken down from the whipping post, amidst cheers and applause. A thunderous boom announced a new round of fireworks, as the Elites celebrated the appearance of Jupiter. For the first time since the revolution, a mongrel had been given the rights of a citizen, and all of Amoi was abuzz with the news.

Day of the Mongrel

The day had turned into a celebration like no other in the history of Amoi. The unprecedented gathering of citizens and non-citizens alike, converging on Eos to witness the extraordinary punishment of the Blondies, and the subsequent appearance of Jupiter herself, produced excitement and revelry that was not to be contained. It was as though the entire city was on holiday, the crowds cheering and singing the praises of Jupiter and becoming increasingly intoxicated and loud as the day progressed and the merriment continued.

And it was not just those in Tanagura that were caught up in the moment, for the residents of Midas--and especially, the slums of Ceres--were equally enthusiastic. Gangs of youth caroused the streets in high spirits, setting off homemade firecrackers and laughing like children. For the mongrels, the citizenship of Riki the Dark--though his status was but that of a pet--was celebrated in an almost giddy frenzy. It represented a hope none of them had ever before dared to dream, that mongrels might one day be admitted back into Jupiter's fold. If one mongrel had become a citizen, why not another? Why not all of them? It was a chance to escape the hard, almost unbearable life most of them had taken for granted since birth, and they clung to it with surprising tenacity, shouting cheers to Jupiter and to the mongrel once informally known to them as the Prince of Midas.

Though most mongrels would have found it difficult to exchange their carefree existence for the subservience of pethood, the concept of citizenship was too seductive to ignore; it was easy to

make the leap to the possibility of citizenship generally, to gaining permanent admittance into the forbidden city, to be given rights equal to that of eunuchs and, who knows? Perhaps one day mongrels would even be among the Elite.

While this last possibility was almost absurd in its optimism, the mongrels could not be dissuaded from their celebration; they were determined to turn the day into a festival of all festivals, and everywhere in Ceres, the same toast and cheer could be heard: "To Riki! To Riki the Dark!" and "All hail Jupiter!"

Shortly after the whippings, the weather shifted, and--much to the delight of the crowds--it began to snow, a beautiful, slowly unfolding swirl of immense flakes, that seemed only to make the day even more surreal. Fireworks continued to explode in the whitening skies, the sound now muffled by the falling snow. The flashes of color were breathtaking against the uncertain white, whose curtain only barely contained the sun that, every so often, broke out from behind clouds to shine down on the spectacle below.

In the tent where the Blondies had been taken after the whippings, the mood was quite different. Raoul, Megala and Xian were all awake but in horrible pain, while Omaki and Heiku drifted in and out of consciousness, groaning. Iason, after a brief bit of mumbling, had fallen completely unconscious and lay as though dead. And Riki, whose whipping had not been anticipated and who was brought into the tent without an attending medic, roused every few moments, screaming his agony.

"For pity's sake! Someone give him an opiate!" Katze commanded, angrily, and at his word a medic rushed to the mongrel's side to attend to him. The self-assured eunuch had become the man in charge, and servants and medics alike turned to him for direction.

"My Master needs an opiate, too," Yui announced, a little frantically, as he placed a wet cloth to Raoul's forehead to help cool his flushed skin. Though Raoul, out of pride, did not vocalize this particular request himself, he was glad for Yui's attention on this point.

“I gave him one,” another medic answered, frowning.

“He needs more! He’s barely conscious from the pain!”

The medic peered at Raoul, noting the Blondie’s clenched teeth and nodding. “Very well. This will probably put you to sleep,” he advised, as he injected more of the potent pain-killer into his arm.

Raoul only nodded, feeling at that moment extraordinarily grateful to Yui for his intervention. The combination of the whipping and the Acceleration was excruciating, and he felt barely able to keep from crying out, privately wishing he had not taken the Acceleration option, for the pain was mind-boggling, and he was starting to feel a bit desperate.

“I need another medic over here!” Katze shouted, panicking when the two medics feverishly attending Iason were unable to find his pulse. They flipped him onto his back, but even the pressure on his wounds did not rouse him.

“He’s not breathing,” one murmured, placing a head to his chest.

“What?” Raoul, though in agony from his own pain, watched the unfolding crisis with alarm. “He’s not breathing?”

“Wait. I have it,” the other announced. “It’s faint and very slow, but he has a pulse. And he’s breathing--I just saw his chest move.”

“That’s strange. He took Acceleration. His pulse should be off the charts. And he should be running a fever, but he feels cold.”

“He’s lost a bit of blood,” another medic noted, stating the obvious, for the cot Iason had initially been placed on was soaked crimson.

Raoul, who was gritting his teeth to keep from groaning his anguish as waves of pain continued to wrack his body, was beside himself with worry when he saw Iason’s lifeless form. “Is he all right? Will he be all right?” he demanded.

Katze turned to him. “He’s alive.”

The great Blondie struggled to stay awake, but the sudden infusion of opiates almost immediately pulled him under, and he fell asleep murmuring Iason’s name over and over. Yui attended

him quietly, frowning, sharp pains of jealousy only adding to his personal anguish in watching his Master suffer.

Raoul was not the only one to call out Iason's name, for Riki suddenly opened his eyes, crying out for him. Seemingly in response to the sound of his pet's distress, Iason was roused almost to consciousness, much to everyone's relief. But in the next moment he was motionless again, lying as if dead.

From outside the tent, a loud voice could be heard, arguing with Odi and the other guards. "I demand that you let me pass! I've brought a physician, let me through!"

On hearing this, Katze rushed to the entrance of the tent, where Xanthus Kahn and Yutaku Iman were trying to convince Odi and Ayuda to let them into the tent.

"Odi! Let them in, it's all right," Katze ordered. "Iason needs help!"

Odi and Ayuda both paused and then nodded to Katze, stepping aside to let the Blondies enter.

Upon entering, Yutaku immediately rushed to Iason's side, throwing off his cape and pushing up his sleeves. "Roll him onto his stomach!" he ordered. "Are you all idiots? He's just been whipped!"

"He barely has a pulse," one medic explained, a little defensively. "And we weren't even sure he was breathing. We were preparing to resuscitate him."

At this, Yutaku quieted, examining Iason for a few moments. He leaned forward, placing a hand to Iason's head. "Extraordinary," he whispered.

"What is it?" Xanthus asked, moving up behind him.

"I've only seen this once before. It's a reaction to the Accelerator. He's gone into interstasis."

"Interstasis? What does that mean?"

"It's a...sort of hibernation. The dosage of Acceleration was too much for his system, so he's shut down. It's a paradoxical reaction--rather than increasing his metabolism into a catabolic state, he's gone the other direction."

Xanthus frowned at this. "But I was advised to give him Accelerator! I was told that was the safest course, because he was taking so many strikes."

Yutaku nodded. "Normally that would be the case. But apparently Iason is highly reactive to Acceleration." Now the Blondie's gaze shifted to Riki, who had quieted on the cot some distance away. "If his little pet there hadn't stepped in, Iason wouldn't have made it."

Katze and Daryl exchanged worried glances at this.

"Is he going to be all right?" Katze asked.

The Blondie examined Iason a few more moments before replying. "I think so. Interstasis is a good thing--not every Blondie is capable of it, I believe. At least, it's only been documented a few times. We'll just have to wait for him to wake up, but that might be a few days. We need to get him to the hospital now, though."

Katze shook his head. "We were given explicit instructions NOT to take them to the hospital. Master Iason specifically forbade it. We were going to take them all back to the penthouse."

"What! That's absurd," Yutaku challenged. "Iason needs a hospital!"

"Hold on," Xanthus argued, lowering his voice. "I can see his point. He wants this to be handled privately."

"That's right," Xian called from his cot. "Iason made his views very clear. And that goes for the rest of us, too."

"Besides, taking the Blondies to Tanagura Medical would present problems for the hospital--I overheard one of the patrollers saying there was already a crowd there, waiting, and the front desk is overwhelmed with residents suddenly claiming to be sick," Xanthus continued.

Yutaku sighed. "Very well. I'll have what we need brought to the penthouse." He flipped open his communicator and made arrangements (which consisted primarily in shouting threats into the phone) for equipment and personnel to be transported to the Eos tower.

“We’re going to have a slight logistics problem,” Katze pointed out. “There’s no way we can make it back to the tower through these crowds.”

Xanthus nodded. “The streets are completely gridlocked. You’ll have to fly back.”

“That’s the problem--there’s no access inside the penthouse from the roof.”

“What about the Observatory?” Daryl suggested. “The panels retract--couldn’t you land there?”

“But how are we going to get them downstairs?” Katze argued. “Down the spiral staircase? That would be almost impossible.”

“Actually,” Megala answered, “you can just go through the hidden passageway to the lift.”

“What hidden passageway?” Katze demanded.

“Um,” Megala stammered, blushing, “the one I built into the wall of the Observatory. It leads to a wing above the penthouse and then to a lift.”

Xian laughed at this. “Megala! You’re going to be sitting in manure when Raoul and Iason find out there’s another hidden passageway you didn’t tell them about.”

“I didn’t think it mattered,” Megala protested, “since it doesn’t lead OUT of the penthouse.”

“Where does the lift go?” Katze asked.

“To the library, behind a bookcase.”

“But why didn’t you tell them about it, Megala?” Xian pressed.

“I don’t know,” Megala whispered, evasively. In fact, he was too embarrassed to tell them that he had originally designed the penthouse with Raoul in mind, fantasizing that one day Raoul--not Iason--would be Head of the Syndicate. And then Megala would be Raoul’s lover, and living in the penthouse. So Megala had built the Syndicate’s home with all the sorts of hidden passageways he would have loved himself, hoping to impress his would-be lover with his ingenuity. In fact, there were other hidden places that he had not told them about, nor did he plan to, though now he rather regretted

not confessing to this particular passageway, as its discovery would rain censure down on him anew.

Xian continued to snicker, though a bit hoarsely. "Raoul's going to have you over his knee," he teased.

Megala reddened at this, finding the thought surprisingly erotic.

"Then it's settled," Xanthus announced. "We'll land in the Observatory. And I think we ought to get the Blondies there as quickly as possible."

"Agreed," Yutaku nodded.

* * *

"Hey, sexy," Askel greeted, grinning at his brother as he approached.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" Freyn demanded. "You're supposed to be back at your post!"

"I told you, you busted my communicator. I tried calling you like, a zillion times." Askel sidled toward him, then sat down with a sigh in one of the empty chairs in the hall.

"What are you doing? Get back to Megala's suite!"

Askel yawned. "Why? There's no one left in the building. Everyone is at the...thing."

"You don't know that! Get your ass back there!"

"Let me borrow your communicator, then. I don't want to miss it, and since you BROKE mine, it's only fair."

Freyn snorted at this. "Dream on. You're the one who bought a 4599 Unit instead of a 6900. Yours was going to fall apart one way or another, anyway."

"I thought you said they were impossible to break?" Askel challenged.

"Get back to your post!"

"Give me your communicator, first."

"Fuck, no!"

"Well, let me watch it with you, then. Turn it on, already. Isn't it almost time?"

“I mean it, Askel. Get back there or I’ll call Odi.”

Askel shrugged, grinning. “Call him.”

“I will!”

“No, you won’t. Because he said he’d stick that Unit up your ass if you called him again.”

Freyn sighed. “He’s going to kill us if he finds out you left your post.”

“So? We won’t tell him. Hurry up! That’s the tower chime! We’re missing it!”

Freyn fumbled with his communicator, flipping on the holoprojection just as it came online at the strike of 13:00. The public whippings were being broadcast on Jupiter’s information channel, with complete visual and 3-dimensional footage. The scene from the square in front of the Emporium was projected in front of them.

“Holy shit!” Freyn breathed.

“Look! It’s...Lord Sami!” Askel pointed, excited.

“Of course it’s Lord Sami! Idiot! He’s about to be whipped!”

“I know, but it’s weird to see him on projection. Oh! Check out Lord Kahn! He’s fucking hot!”

Freyn raised an eyebrow. “He does have a nice body. Shit. Look at those shoulders.”

“Isn’t there supposed to be audio? Why is there just silence?”

“I don’t know.” Frowning, Freyn fumbled with the unit.

“We’re missing it! He’s...he’s saying something! Here, give it to me!”

“Dammit! You just...ow! Quit grabbing me!”

The brothers fought over the unit for a few moments before it spun out of Freyn’s hands, crashing to the floor, the projection abruptly ending.

“Fuck! You...you broke it, you moron!” Furious, Freyn lunged for Askel, who managed to dodge his punch, but wasn’t able to move out of the way before Freyn rammed him with his body, sending them both crashing to the floor. They wrestled on the floor for a few moments until finally they both calmed, breathing hard.

“Hmmm.” Askel buried his head in his brother’s hair, smiling.
“You smell good.”

“Dammit, Ask! Cut it out!”

“Why? I think you’re enjoying this,” he teased. “You’re getting very...lumpy. Hey. Remember the other night, after we drank that cider?”

“Hush,” Freyn whispered, swallowing hard.

“You know, we might have had an interesting time...except you came the moment I touched you.”

Suddenly keenly aware of Askel’s masculinity, Freyn grew quiet, contemplating him for a moment.

“Kiss me,” Askel whispered.

“No.” Freyn kept Askel’s wrists pinned to the floor, and now became uncomfortably aware of his quickly maturing erection.

“You know you want to.”

For a moment, Freyn lay on this brother, uncertain, wavering between wanting to give into his desires and wanting to get up.

“Want me to suck you off?” Askel teased.

“In your dreams,” Freyn grumbled, releasing him and rolling off him to get up.

Askel laughed, sitting up. “You know, I thought for a moment there you were really going to do it.”

Freyn made no reply, picking up the communicator and punching random buttons in an unsuccessful attempt to bring the projection back online.

“Fuck. Now we have two broken communicators. Odi’s gonna kill us.”

“And we’re missing the broadcast.”

“Well, we’ll get to see that later, anyway, from the archives.”

“I’m starving. When’s Tai bringing lunch?” Askel moaned.

“Askel. Get your ass back to your post now. I bloody mean it. Or I’ll tell Odi you left it. This is a...serious security breach.”

“Oh, all right, ya big baby. Geez! Like, what could possibly happen in five minutes?”

"You are the worst security guard in the entire Quadrant. I ought to report you to the Prefect Council."

"I'm going! Sheesh! Anyway, I never wanted to be a security guard in the first place. I wanted to work at the zoo in Urus."

"Yeah, well. That's where you belong, with the other animals."

"It's boring. I mean, all I do is just sit there."

"Try reading the Security Protocol Manual. If you don't pass your exams next month you'll be out on the streets."

"And where's this great pay you promised? I'll never be able to afford a pet."

"I told you a thousand times. He's put us on a three-month probation. That's standard for these Blondies. After that we'll have more credits than we'll know what to do with. I mean, come on! We're working for the bloody Head of the Syndicate! You couldn't ask for a better job. But you're jeopardizing it for both of us. So fucking get back to your post!"

"I'm going," Askel retorted, with a sigh. "Serious security breach," he muttered, shaking his head as he walked back to the elevator at the end of the hall. "No one's even here!"

In fact, this was not entirely true. From behind Jupiter's statue, a young, exceptionally beautiful Aristian watched, and waited. Askel's absence provided just the opportunity he was hoping for. As soon as the bodyguard left his post, he moved in, quickly disarming the security panel with a Xeronian Scrambler.

He was, in truth, surprised at how easy it was to enter the architect's quarters again, for he had assumed after the initial break-in it would be much more difficult to gain access. Once again, he had fooled the Eos Tower signature detector at the main entrance, but unlike the previous time, he had not dared to simply walk into the building using his own signature. No, this time he had used an echo board, a device that replicated the genetic signature of the last individual to leave the building, projecting it as his own.

The entire building seemed strangely quiet and empty, much to his confusion, and--because he did not speak Amoian well--he had

no idea that nearly everyone had gone to the public whipping, and that the Commander was no longer even on Amoi.

He moved inside, quickly finding exactly what he was looking for: the secret passage that led out of the Blondie's suite into the bowels of the tower. Anxious, yet determined, he switched on his lantern and made his way through the dark, winding passageway, down stairs and around countless turns, until he came to a door. With shaking fingers, he flipped the small switch on the wall.

The door hummed open. He entered, finding himself in a room dimly illuminated by a series of blue hanging pendant lights. It was some sort of wine cellar, row after row of shelves harboring countless wine bottles, for a moment distracting the young man from his project.

"Holy shit," he whispered, upon seeing an entire wall of Aristian Red Emperor, knowing how expensive the wine was. He shook his head, then flipped open his thermoscanner, frowning when he saw from his readout that there was no one in the penthouse. He had tracked the Commander to the penthouse using a rather sneaky method--Voshka Khosi carried with him at all times Aranshu's pet ring, which had a tracing device embedded in it. But if there was no one in the penthouse, then it meant the Commander was no longer in possession of the ring, and all his labors to track him down had been for naught.

"Damn!" he muttered, perplexed. He made his way up the small staircase and then opened the hidden door; in the next instant he was in the kitchen of Iason's penthouse, wondering where everyone had gone.

He followed the ring signal through the penthouse until he arrived at the room where the signal originated, and finding the door open, peered inside. Moments later he located the ring itself, lying half-concealed beneath one of the pillows on the bed. He stared at it for a moment, suddenly shuddering as he remembered the first time the Commander had slipped it onto his arm. But he was smart enough not to pick it up, knowing full well the ring would

recognize his signature and spring to life on its own, fastening itself, as though by magic, around his wrist.

A sudden noise startled him, and he whipped around, alarmed. He heard voices--or was it screaming? He listened, then realized he was hearing the sound of children, running down the hall. Stepping into the shadows of the room, he waited, but was startled when he was suddenly face to face with a spherical robotic device of some sort, which was attempting to scan his retina.

He gasped, backing up against the wall and quickly shutting his eyes, but it was too late: the Guardian had the information it needed. It processed the three conflicting identities in its database and, being only a security device and not a sentient computer capable of intricate problem-solving, simply merged together the information: Blondie genetic signature, retinal scan of Aristian Wyn Quantum, and the registered signature of Aranshu, missing pet of Voshka Khosi.

“Good afternoon, Lord Aranshu,” it greeted, unable to process the paradox of a Blondie being also a registered pet. “Your Master is looking for you.” The Guardian, configured only to protect Aki, was unconcerned with Aranshu’s status as a runaway pet, other than to relate the relevant information that was in his database, that Voshka Khosi had reported him as missing. Nor did it attempt to access anything other than basic identification records, for if it had, it would have discovered that Wyn Quantum was wanted on Aristia for the massacre at the Merovian palace.

“Holy shit,” Wyn whispered, awed by the tiny device and its impressive identification capabilities.

“Your Master has been looking for you for 10 years,” the Guardian repeated.

“My ‘Master’ can fucking kiss my ass!” Wyn replied.

“Shall I relay the message, ‘Holy shit, my Master can fucking kiss my ass,’ to Commander Voshka Khosi?” the Guardian asked, rather robotically.

Wyn smiled. "No. I'll deliver that message personally. No wait! Yes, please DO deliver that message--but wait about two weeks first."

"Your message, 'Holy shit, my Master can fucking kiss my ass,' will be relayed to Commander Khosi in two weeks, Lord Aranshu," the Guardian clarified. "Have a nice day."

With that, it turned and whizzed out of the room, just as quickly as it had arrived.

Wyn watched it, smiling. He rather liked being called Lord Aranshu. It certainly made his pet name more appealing. His communicator had lit up and he gazed at the incoming message, frowning.

Abort. VK has left Amoi.

"Fuck," he whispered, disappointed. He waited for a few moments and, determining that the children had left, hurried back toward the kitchen, anxious to leave the penthouse before he was discovered, now that he had learned of the Commander's departure. As he made his way through the great hall couldn't help look around a bit, gaping at the luxurious furnishings in disbelief. These Amoian Blondies...this Iason Mink, certainly had a bit of wealth, that much was obvious. He happened to catch sight of something on a table near the fireplace that made him gasp. He moved closer, frowning.

How could it be? And...what did it mean? With shaking fingers, he picked up the small book that was lying on the table, which had imprinted into the cover an engraving he recognized immediately. It was a design based on the Amoian letters Y and X, and he knew it because he had seen it before, many times: his mother had a brand-mark exactly like it, on her shoulder, though she had never told him where it had come from. Somehow Wyn always suspected that it had something to do with his father, who he now knew must have been a Blondie, based on his own genetic makeup. He had been told the Blondies were sterile, but there was no other explanation. And now, this book--with the mark he knew so well--convinced him it was so; but did it belong to Iason Mink? Why then were the initials

X and Y? He flipped through the pages but found it was written in Amoian, which he could not read.

Though he longed to explore the penthouse a bit more, the sound of voices approaching forced him to abandon any such project; he slipped through the kitchen and left the way he had entered, never once detected, as though he had not even been there at all.

* * *

Her rage had been the purest emotion she had experienced since her awakening; her rage, and her hurt and betrayal. Jupiter had been devastated as she watched her children conspire against her, but there was only one among the Blondies whose treachery tore deep into her heart--for Jupiter did, indeed have a heart.

That Iason, her beloved favorite, would turn against her, would be the mastermind behind the plan to destroy her, was inconceivable to the sentient computer. She was so bewildered by the conversations of the Blondies that she could only watch in horror and despair as they plotted against her. In truth, she had only sent Enyu as a spy to see if the rumors about Iason and his pet were true, but at the most Jupiter had only intended to reprimand her favorite and insist that the mongrel be sent away.

To learn, instead, that Iason was actively seeking to overthrow her authority was a complete surprise, and her rage was such that she had given him an impossible sentence--one that even she knew was probably too great for the Blondie to bear. She had expected him to take her offer and surrender the pet and thereby submit to her authority; she would have then reduced his sentence, as promised.

But Iason had refused to give up the mongrel. And for that she had distanced herself from him, allowing him to be shackled to the whipping post to endure the 60 strikes of his original sentence. But from the very first strike she had been overwhelmed with sorrow as she watched him suffer. When Iason began to scream, Jupiter

realized, with growing anxiety, that she had made a grave error--that the sentence was too severe, and that no Blondie could endure it. Yet she could not intervene without further damaging her authority, and so she was forced to watch, helpless, as Iason moved in and out of consciousness.

And then Riki had stepped in for him, in a pure act of love so selfless, so beautiful, that Jupiter could remain hidden no more. The very mongrel that had, for so long, incited in her feelings of annoyance and jealousy, now inspired relief and even affection. He had saved Iason from further agony, and for the first time, Jupiter looked upon him with kinder eyes, recognizing that the bond between Iason and his pet was something beyond even her reach. She had halted the punishment then, deciding at that moment to finally grant Iason what he had begged her for, what she had known for so long he wanted but had been so reluctant to give.

Iason could keep his brave little pet; Jupiter had decided that, because of Iason, she would grant an exception to the usual rules of pet administration, and so she had made the mongrel an A-class pet, to at least confer on him the status that was necessary to make such an arrangement palatable to the other Elites.

Now Jupiter remained alone in her sanctum, reflecting on all these things, realizing at long last that she could not share with Iason the same bond that he shared with his pet, realizing, too, that her laws had ceased to be tools to protect Amoi and create order, and instead were obstacles the happiness of her Elite, thereby making further rebellion an absolute certainty.

And so, as the citizens and non-citizens alike celebrated throughout the night, Jupiter rewrote the General Code for the new world that had emerged.

* * *

Iason struggled to regain consciousness, his thoughts now bent around one concern only: Riki. He was certain he had heard his pet screaming. Riki was in trouble and needed him, but much as the

Blondie tried, he could not seem to find his way out of the place of darkness and pain where he now found himself.

And then, he saw a familiar face, gazing at him with concern from some feet away. Raoul.

“You’re dreaming,” he soothed. “Riki is fine.”

A blackness overcame the Blondie and the world seemed to fall away, and he with it, clinging to Raoul’s softly spoken reassurances. Then, for a long time, he was nowhere at all. Then, as his pain forced him into awareness again, he was comforted by a wondrous warmth, an incredible absence of pain, as A-class pharmaceuticals were once again pumped into his body. He drifted away again, this time peacefully, riding on a sea of indecipherable dreams.

He opened his eyes; Raoul, again, was gazing at him, this time closer, in a chair next to his bed. He was back at the penthouse, in his own room.

The Blondie put a hand to his forehead, smiling. “Your fever’s broken.”

Iason stared back at him, confused, trying to remember what had happened. Then, images from the whipping pressed into his mind, and he shuddered, memories of the pain and confusion like shards of glass piercing into his thoughts.

“Can I get you anything?” Raoul asked.

“Riki,” Iason whispered.

Raoul took Iason’s hands in his, his expression serious. “You can’t see him now. He’s sleeping.”

Iason’s brow furrowed at this, and he frowned. “Wake him up,” he demanded, irritably. “I want to see him.”

“I can’t wake him up, Iason. He’s...still recovering.”

“What?” At this, Iason struggled to get up. He was on his stomach, and found, much to his dismay, that he was too weak to move.

“Don’t try to get up,” Raoul whispered. “You’re not ready, either. Relax, Iason. I’ll tell you about Riki.”

“Tell me? Tell me what?”

“Iason. Riki’s going to be fine. But he’s been through a lot. What he did for you...he was very brave.”

“What do you mean?” Iason demanded. “What are you talking about? Where is he?”

“He’s in his room, sleeping. I’ll tell you what happened, but you must promise me not to get upset.”

This only seemed to inflame Iason’s worries even more, as he again struggled to get up. “What have I to get upset about? Is he ill? Is he...injured?”

“Iason. Stop trying to get up or I’ll tell you nothing,” Raoul scolded.

“Please tell me, Raoul!”

“I’m trying to. Did you hear me? Quit moving like that! Just lie still.”

At this, Iason went limp, gazing imploringly up at Raoul. “What happened to Riki?”

“He’s recovering, same as you. Iason. When you...were being whipped, Riki--well, much as you know I hate to give the mongrel any credit, he did something...rather extraordinary. He ran out onto the stage and stood in front you, and then demanded he take the rest of your punishment.”

Iason, not quite believing what he was hearing, and starting to doubt that he was awake after all, stared back at Raoul in disbelief. “What are you saying?”

“I’m saying that he stood in for you. Xanthus told me it was the 28th strike. You had lost consciousness. I’m not sure you could have taken much more. And there he was, standing on the stage, stripping off his shirt and insisting that he take the rest of your strikes. I could hardly believe it myself, I confess.” Raoul smiled slightly, remembering the awe he had felt when Riki had offered himself in Iason’s place, the small, fierce mongrel standing fearlessly before mighty Kahn, whose whip was still dripping with blood, and whose voice alone was enough to intimidate most Blondies.

Iason slowly digested this information, a thousand emotions pressing into his heart, all at once. He was stunned with his pet's willingness to take on his own punishment, and touched by it, so much so that at first he could not even speak. His pet...went under the whip? Iason knew, from the horror he had experienced, what hell Riki had been through, and it physically hurt him to think of his pet in such agony. This was not the same as a turn under the taming stick or any other of the countless punishments Iason had used to correct his wayward pet, this was pure pain in the highest degree--tortuous, agonizing, impossibly wretched misery. Much as he loved that Riki had stood in for him, had been willing to help him in his darkest hour, it was terrible to confront the reality of his sacrifice, and what the poor mongrel had suffered in his stead. And he was worried; could his pet endure such punishment? How many strikes exactly had he taken? He felt too disoriented and upset to try and count, but if he stood in at the 28th strike, that meant...could it be possible? More than half the strikes? His pet had taken...33 strikes? More than even he had endured?

"Oh pet," he whispered, his voice shaking. "Is he all right, Raoul?"

"Yes. I told you--he's going to be fine, though it's a bit of a tough ride for him, that much is clear enough."

Then, as the full realization of what Raoul was saying sunk in, he began to feel one overriding emotion: anger.

"You mean to tell me that no one stopped him?" he demanded.

"Iason. You were in agony. No one could bear to see you that way. I wasn't in a position to do much of anything but...I confess, I wouldn't have stopped him. And not for the reasons you think. It wasn't that I wanted to see him suffer. I just couldn't bear your suffering anymore."

"Are you saying Riki took...33 strikes? Xanthus--he agreed to that? Raoul! Help me up."

"I told you, Iason. You can't see him now, he's resting. But...he didn't take all 33 strikes. There's something else I have to tell you. Calm down! Iason!"

But the Blondie, in his concern for Riki, had summoned all his strength and managed to sit up. "I want to see him now, Raoul."

Raoul sighed. "All right. I'll bring him to you. But, let me finish telling you what happened. Lie back down, Iason."

"Not until I see Riki."

"You stubborn, exasperating...lie down this moment or perhaps I shall turn you over my knee! I'll make that whipping seem like a picnic in Vendel Park compared to what I have in store for you!"

At this, Iason softened, smiling slightly at Raoul's ridiculous threat. He suddenly felt a bit weak, even his small bit of effort sapping him.

"That's it," Raoul encouraged, as Iason lay back on the bed. "Now. I'll tell you the rest. It was quite...remarkable, actually. It was the 40th strike, and suddenly Jupiter appeared on the stage." He paused for a moment, smiling at Iason's surprised look, then nodded. "Yes. Jupiter. Suddenly she was there, standing in front of Riki, with her arm held up to stop Xanthus." Now Raoul chuckled, remembering the priceless look on Xanthus's face as the startled Blondie knelt down, his whip falling onto the stage. "I don't remember the exact words, but it's all on archive, so you can watch it yourself, later. I confess at the time I was just as stunned as everyone else, so--"

"Raoul! What did Jupiter say?" Iason interrupted, impatiently.

Raoul smiled. "She said Riki had suffered enough. And she...gave Riki formal status. Jupiter made him a citizen, and an A-class pet."

At this, Iason fell silent, staring back at Raoul in disbelief. A mongrel formally recognized by Jupiter? But what exactly did that mean?

"Bring him to me," he whispered.

Raoul nodded, rising. "All right." He paused for a moment. "Though you understand, he's a bit delirious. The Acceleration, and he's so small--the whipping was very hard on him."

"Bring him," Iason repeated, worried.

So Raoul went to fetch the mongrel, who was sleeping rather fitfully. As Raoul gathered him in his arms and began walking with him back to Iason's room, Riki opened his eyes, startled to see the Blondie smiling down at him.

"What the fuck?" he mumbled, confused.

"It's all right. Iason wants to see you."

"Iason." Riki's eyes widened, his expression suddenly alarmed. "Is he okay?"

"He's doing much better." Raoul smiled again. "You...probably saved his life."

It was the first time Raoul had attributed to him anything that wasn't an insult of some kind, and Riki hardly knew how to respond. "This is a dream," he murmured, finally, closing his eyes.

Raoul carried him to Iason, who, on seeing Riki's fragile state, was overcome with emotion.

"Riki," he whispered, as Raoul lay him down on the bed.

Riki had fallen asleep again. Iason looked at the bandages that covered his back, frowning. "Oh, love." He reached out, brushing the hair from Riki's face, and the mongrel's eyes fluttered open momentarily.

"Iason."

"Hello, love." Iason smiled, although he found his eyes were filling with tears.

Riki was too weak to answer, closing his eyes again.

"Oh, pet." Iason felt as though his heart would burst open, and all his love and worry for his pet spill out of him, for it was too much to contain. "My poor little pet! Oh, Riki, Riki. What have they done to you?"

Raoul watched this interchange for a moment, and then backed away, leaving Iason alone with his pet. Master and pet almost immediately fell asleep together, each comforted by the presence of the other.

* * *

Guy was half drunk, yet again, staring at the table in front of him, when he was startled by a clanking. He blinked, trying to focus on the object that had just been tossed in front of him and then suddenly froze. It was Kei's pendant. The pendant Guy had given him! He seized it, though a little clumsily, looking up with surprise.

"Riki told me to give that to you. I'm not sure why he had it," Katze explained, lighting up a smoke and sitting down on the other side of the booth. "You look like shit, Guy."

"Where is Kei?" Guy cried. "He...he can't be...where Riki said!"

"How the fuck should I know?" Katze shrugged. "I don't even know who he is. Although next time you see him, tell him I intend to kick his ass for trying hedge into my territory. I've heard all sorts of reports and let me tell you, I don't intend to let him get away it."

"I haven't seen him...in weeks!"

"I shouldn't wonder, with you looking like that. Try bathing." Katze looked around the pool hall, frowning. "Where's the rest of the gang?"

Guy frowned. "They're all...celebrating. Toasting Riki! I refused!" The mongrel, a bit incoherent after drinking so much, focused on the pendant again, trying to make sense of it. "This pendant...how did he get this? It must be...then...is it true? Tell Riki...tell him I'm gonna kill him!"

"Tell him yourself, I have no patience for your little love feuds. But here's a bit of advice for you. If you try to go near Riki, Odi and Ayuda will break your arms and legs, one at a time. So whatever it is you're pissed at him over, I suggest you get over it. Be happy for him, Guy. He got out of this dump and is living a better life. You could too, you know. Have you heard about Jupiter's new laws?"

"I'd sooner die than be...a pet," Guy spat. "And I'll never forgive him! Never! Tell him that! I'll have my...vengeance!"

"Suit yourself." Katze rose, taking another long drag on his smoke before crushing the butt onto the table. "You're pathetic, you know that?"

"Fuck you! Fuck you and everyone else, too! I'll get my vengeance! Tell Riki that!"

Katze frowned at this, but shrugged it off, deciding that Guy was simply drunk. And Guy was not the only one--everywhere he went, mongrels and Elites alike were intoxicated. It was completely insane. He'd never seen anything like it in all his days. It was almost like anarchy. No--it was more like, an immense party. A party that had taken on a life of its own. A celebration like no other, and one that everyone seemed to be enjoying, except, of course, the Midas and Tanagura Police, who were completely overwhelmed with the crowds, and who had given up on trying to get traffic moving again. Katze had been forced to borrow Iason's hovercraft to reach Midas, for the streets had become venues for the Jupiter's Eve celebration, the crowds merrily making their way around the abandoned vehicles that lined every road in Tanagura, Midas, and beyond.

He turned to leave, smiling when he saw a group of mongrels raising their beer bottles in unison. "To Riki! To Riki the Dark!" they cried.

"Unbelievable," he whispered, shaking his head.

* * *

It was some after the public whipping that the Blondies began emerging from their respective rooms, gathering in the great hall. Xian, Megala and Raoul were the first ones to do so, followed by Heiku, and then Omaki. Iason remained in bed for several days, at first in interstasis, and later, with a fever, as the residual Acceleration in his system kicked in and increased his metabolic processes. Yousi was there, as well, mostly to help comfort Heiku, and because he was frightened of the crowds that had gathered outside the Eos Tower, calling for the Blondies to come out.

The great hall was filled with gift baskets for the Blondies from well-wishing Elites, and even a few for Riki, for it turned out that most who witnessed the whippings actually admired the Blondies for their courage to challenge Jupiter, and respected Riki for his loyalty to his Master. In truth, the six Blondies had become nothing less than heroes, and Riki a living legend, for it was his sacrifice that

had garnered Jupiter's intercession and appearance, something that had never before happened in the history of Amoi.

The Blondies, save Iason, were gathered around the fire one afternoon, when Askel announced that Headmaster Konami Sung had arrived to see them.

"Jupiter save us," Heiku groaned. "I think I'd rather go back under the whip."

"I hope he doesn't plan on lecturing us," Omaki remarked.

"Of course he's going to, that's why he's come," Raoul said, with a great sigh. "I wouldn't be surprised if he brings his crop whip and insists we all take a few strikes."

The others laughed at this, although it was not far from the truth. Headmaster Konami was furious with them, and his entrance in the great hall made his view quiet clear.

"I always knew the lot of you would be trouble," he began, his brow furrowed as he strode into the hall. "But I never would have imagined you'd all be so defiant--and stupid--as to challenge Jupiter. It seems all my efforts to mold you were for nothing, you are all complete deviants, with no regard to laws of any kind, and in my view you should have all taken twice as many lashes for your insubordination. If it were up to me, there wouldn't be skin left on your backs. In fact, I ought to give each of you a thrashing, right here and now. Except you, Yousi. I don't mean you. But as for the rest of you, I really should have brought my whip."

"Won't you sit down, Headmaster?" Omaki replied, a bit saucily.

"You see! That," the Headmaster pointed to Omaki, "that's just what I'm talking about. No respect for authority. Well! You see where your insolence has gotten you? Did I not warn you that Jupiter's laws are absolute?"

Heiku groaned. "Please. We've already been punished. Must we endure another one of your lectures?"

"This is only the beginning," the Headmaster replied, arms crossed on his chest as he stood before them, glaring. "I'm going to get to the bottom of this. You'll tell me everything, down to the last

detail, and then you'll listen to what I have to say, for as long as I say it. Xian! Don't roll your eyes."

"For pity's sake, we're not children," Xian argued, pouting.

"Indeed. You are not. Which makes your behavior even more surprising. You should all be models for others to emulate--you should be paragons! Paragons, I tell you! Instead you act like a pack of scoundrels, plotting against the hand that feeds you!"

The Blondies were forced then to endure the longest tongue-lashing any of them had ever before received from the infamous Headmaster, who refused to let up until all of them appeared duly remorseful and utterly chastised, their heads bowed in shame. After what seemed like an eternity, Lord Sung finally fell silent, looking at each of them with transparent emotion, his anger and disappointment fueling his censure.

"Where is Iason?" he demanded, finally.

"He's still in bed. He's probably asleep," Raoul answered, hoping to spare Iason the inevitable reprimand, at least for the time being.

But the Headmaster was not to be dissuaded. "I'll see him now."

Raoul rose, with a sigh, and led him to Iason's room. The Blondie was, in fact, awake, and sitting up in bed, gazing down at Riki, who was asleep next to him.

Iason looked up, his face showing his surprise and mortification upon seeing the Headmaster. He lowered his eyes, unable to meet Lord Sung's gaze.

"Good. At least you have the decency to feel shame," he remarked, his voice sharp, though somehow less severe than it had been with the other Blondies.

Raoul left them alone, and the Headmaster moved closer to Iason, sighing as he sat down on the chair next to the bed. For some moments there was a strained silence between them.

"Go ahead," Iason said, finally. "I deserve whatever you have to say."

“Iason,” Konami whispered, shaking his head. “In fact, I find I am at a loss for words.”

“That does not surprise me.”

“Why, Iason?” he asked, imploringly, his voice lowering to a whisper. “Why? You risked everything--surely you know Jupiter was lenient with you. You might have been put to death.”

“I know. I am...fortunate for Jupiter’s grace.” Now he dared to meet the Headmaster’s gaze. “I thought I was doing...what was best. For all of us.”

At this, the Headmaster grew angry. “That’s not true. Don’t give me excuses, now.” His gaze shifted to the mongrel. “You did it to satisfy your own sexual perversions. Isn’t that so? You wanted this pet, even though it displeased Jupiter. Everyone knows you take your own pet, Iason. Your desires blinded you. But you always do just as you please. Didn’t I warn you that you would find yourself in serious trouble one day if you persisted in following your desires rather than the law?”

“Yes, you did,” Iason conceded. “Though not precisely like that. And perhaps you are partially right. But quite honestly, I thought...perhaps it would be better for all of us, to be free from Jupiter’s authority.”

“Do you hear what you’re saying? Iason. Even if you were able to bring Jupiter down--which I find remarkable that you even entertained as a remote possibility--think about the consequences! Jupiter controls everything. Without Jupiter, everything falls apart. You don’t see that? We depend on her for everything--energy, security, order, food, life--even our culture requires Jupiter. It would be pure anarchy--nothing short of chaos--to attempt to survive on this barren planet without her. Tanagura’s prosperity is due entirely to Jupiter. Do you not see that? How could you think it was even possible to exist without her? And you, of all people, Iason. You are the Head of the Syndicate! Jupiter has been so good to you, how could you even think of betraying her?”

Iason bowed his head, frowning. "Perhaps you are right. I was...blinded. But not just by my desires." Now he looked up again, into the Headmaster's eyes. "By love."

Lord Sung sighed, exasperated. "I don't understand you. Love? Did you give a thought to your duty--your responsibility to all of Amoi, and to Jupiter herself? If there is anyone who should elicit your love, it should be Jupiter. You have no rank or position outside the society Jupiter has ordained. Suffice it to say, I am deeply disappointed in you, Iason."

These words cut into Iason's heart, for the Headmaster had always been the closest thing to a father to him. He did not mind so much being scolded, but he hated hearing the disappointment in Konami's voice. He nodded, his throat suddenly constricting.

"However," the Headmaster continued, after a moment, "that does not mean I've stopped caring for you, Iason. And it seems Jupiter has decided to forgive you. You've always been her favorite, you know. Even when you were just a boy. She had me watch after you, even then."

"I remember," Iason replied, smiling.

"I should have known--you know, I always thought, back when you and Raoul were engaged in your salacious little trysts, that I should have done something more to discourage your disobedience. Perhaps you would not have thought to commit such an egregious act, had I give you more severe punishment."

"I found it severe enough," Iason replied, remembering the whipping he and Raoul had endured at the Headmaster's arm.

"Apparently not. I should have swung harder. All my sources tell me that you two continued to engage in forbidden contact years after you left the Academy."

"Surely, Headmaster, you don't believe we were the only ones enjoying such pleasures? I find Jupiter's prohibitions on this point completely untenable. It is impossible to resist, particularly at that age."

"Not impossible," Konami argued. "Difficult, perhaps. But I assure you, I have never done so, nor ever shall."

Iason raised an eyebrow at this. "Oh? Never, Headmaster? I confess I feel a bit of pity for you, on that point."

"Hush," the Headmaster scolded. "I'll not have such talk. Have you forgotten who you are addressing? This is precisely my point. I made no headway with you at all. It is just like when you were a boy and continued to go out walking in the rain. No matter how many times I reprimanded you, you never listened to me. I should have turned you over my knee then, and given you a sound thrashing. I was too soft on you, that much is clear. Although, I daresay I gave Yousi his fair share of whippings, and it didn't stop his downfall, either." He sighed, discouraged. "So I suppose I consider it...a personal failure, somehow, that it's all come to this."

"No. It's just as you said--I did what I wanted, even though I knew the consequences."

"Well, I'm pleased that you're taking personal responsibility. I can't say as much for your peers; I lectured them nearly an hour before any of them seemed remotely sorry for what they'd done."

Iason smiled at this, wishing he could have witnessed the reprimand, with the Blondies sinking down in their chairs as the Headmaster tore into them with his relentless tongue.

"And I must confess, I can at least see there's something quite special about the mongrel you've taken such a liking to. It was extraordinary, his standing in for you. Though I'm a bit surprised Jupiter intervened, and even more so that she gave him formal status. It's almost as though she's giving you what you wanted all along. Of course, she had to punish you--all of you--for what you'd done, because you'd broken her laws. But do you know, she's appended three new laws to the General Code?"

"Oh?" Iason was surprised at this, for as long as he could remember, the Code had never been modified.

Konami nodded. "Yes. One is about the restoration of eunuchs, and gives specific procedures for requesting Jupiter's sanction to do so. The second is, apparently, for you, Iason. It is now legal to keep any pet permanently, if a Master wishes it, and this does not require Jupiter's authorization. And I must say, it's generating quite a bit of

talk. But it's the third law that has stirred up the most controversy and excitement. They're calling it Riki's Law--on the gossip channel, that is. It relates to the citizenship of mongrels. Jupiter will consider petitions for citizenship from any mongrel willing to acknowledge her authority. Citizenship is not automatic, and so far, no one has received a response, but it is now a legal possibility."

Iason was surprised by this, but only nodded, finding himself at a loss for words. The implications were far-reaching, yet he found the only thing he cared about at the moment was the second law the Headmaster had mentioned. Jupiter was allowing him to keep Riki? It seemed impossible, and the Blondie was stunned by the news.

"Of course, as you might imagine, this has not been warmly received by many of the Elites," the Headmaster continued. "I think it will be very difficult to integrate mongrels into Tanagura. In Midas, perhaps. Mongrels are viewed with such contempt--we were all trained to see them thus, so it will not be an easy transition to think of them any other way. Are you well? You seem a bit pale, Iason."

"I'm...a bit tired," he confessed, suddenly feeling weak.

"Then, I'll take your leave," the Headmaster replied, rising. "Although, I hope you don't think I'm finished with you. We'll have a...little chat...when you're up and around again." He gave Iason a pointed look, warning him that more reprimands were coming.

"Yes, Headmaster," Iason replied, meekly. He found, in the presence of the great Blondie, that he was like a child again. No one but Headmaster Konami could produce that effect in him, and he found he was quite anxious to somehow win his approval back.

The Headmaster smiled at him, his eyes filled with affection. "So. Get some rest. I'll call on you in a few weeks."

Iason nodded, and with that, the Headmaster turned on his heels and returned to the great hall. The Blondies were all still sulking from being admonished so thoroughly, and Konami smiled slightly at this. It had taken him awhile, but he had finally managed to reach them. And he intended to keep them firmly in line from that point on, no matter what it took.

“I’m pleased to see you’re all using the moment for some private reflection on your transgressions,” he remarked. “And I hope you don’t think I’m through with you. We’ll all be meeting here, every week on Jupiter’s Eve, to review your duties and responsibilities as Blondies and to memorize the General Code.”

“What!” Heiku protested. “Surely you can’t be serious! We’re not still at the Academy, you know!”

The Headmaster regarded Heiku with a look of disbelief and stern disapproval, one hand on his hip. “How dare you challenge me, Heiku! Have you forgotten that I’m the Head of the Eos Disciplinary Board? I think I’ll bring my whip next time and remind you who you’re dealing with.”

The Blondies fell into a grumpy silence at this, waiting impatiently for the Headmaster to leave.

“One more thing. I have a summons from Jupiter.” The Headmaster held up a piece of paper. “Where’s the logbook? I’m to confiscate that.”

The Blondies looked at each other in confusion, for no one seemed to remember what had become of it.

“I haven’t seen it...since that day,” Raoul remarked.

“Nor I,” Omaki agreed.

“Well, I suggest you find it. I’ll give you until next week to come up with it. Try to stay out of trouble until then.” With that, Lord Sung finally left.

“Headmaster Konami...is a sadist,” Heiku grumbled.

Raoul groaned. “Memorizing the General Code again? Perhaps it would have been better to have been whipped to death.”

“Remember, though, we’re all polygons,” Yousi remarked, looking serious.

Heiku smiled at this. “Paragons, love.”

“Oh. Paragons.” Yousi blushed a little, and fell silent.

“Oh yes,” Omaki sighed, “the paragon speech. I can’t believe he threw that old dogma at us again. Like we hadn’t already heard it a thousand times.”

At this, Megala cleared his throat, sending the whole group into a collective moan.

“Sorry,” he whispered.

“As annoying as it is, I’d rather listen to you clearing your throat for an eternity than have to meet with the Headmaster even one more time,” Heiku exclaimed. “But every week! Jupiter help us.”

“Well, he’s only doing his duty,” Megala replied, a little fearfully. “I mean, I don’t want to sit through more lectures, either, but after all, we did sort of try to bring down Jupiter.”

“Now, I would have thought you would be more angry about all this, Megala,” Omaki remarked. “You didn’t really do anything. After all, you just popped in one evening at dinner time and the next thing you knew, you were being dragged off to be publicly whipped.”

“Yes, well, I confess I wasn’t too happy about it,” he replied. “But then, I guess I deserved it, for the Eos Tower, I mean.”

“Speaking of which,” Raoul began, frowning, “I thought you said you showed us ALL the secret passageways? And then we learn about the one leading from the Observatory?”

Megala blushed at this. “Um...I guess I forgot about that one.”

“Hmmm.” Raoul crossed his arms on his chest, looking suspicious.

“So, Megala. Are there any MORE hidden passageways?” Omaki pressed.

Megala shook his head vehemently. “No. Just that one! I swear!”

“And why don’t we believe you?” Xian teased. “For all we know, there are secret passageways under the entire city, and all of us get spied on by you routinely.”

“Oh no,” Megala protested. “That would have cost far too much.”

“So you’re saying, you would have done so, if you had the resources?” Raoul challenged.

“Oh! I didn’t mean that. I was only thinking of the logistics, when Xian said that.”

“There are more passageways, I’ll wager,” Heiku remarked.

Megala shifted in his seat a little uncomfortably, relieved when Tai brought in some tea and cake, which distracted the Blondies from their interrogation.

The next morning, Iason joined them in the great hall for breakfast, his presence greeted with relief by everyone there.

“You had a rough ride, Iason,” Raoul remarked. “Good to see you looking so well.”

Iason nodded, taking his place at the head of the table.

“Interstasis,” Heiku murmured, shaking his head. “I’ve always wondered about that. They told me, when I lost my arm, that they’d hoped I’d fall into it, but I never did. In fact, I was conscious the entire time, at least until they pumped all those opiates into me. Do you remember anything, after the whipping?”

“Not really. Not until recently. I think I may have dreamed.”

“May I be so bold as to proclaim, officially, that public whippings suck,” Omaki announced.

“Here, here!” The other Blondies voiced their agreement, tapping their water classes with their spoons.

“Seriously, I didn’t think that sort of pain was possible,” Heiku mused. “I think it was even worse than losing the arm. Because at least that was interesting, from a medical perspective.”

Omaki nodded. “I think I wet my pants. It was...quite dreadful.”

“I don’t know how you all withstood it,” Xian remarked. “I was in agony after just five strikes.”

Raoul nodded. “I confess, I was a bit surprised at the pain. Not just during the whipping, but afterwards, as well.”

Iason was silent, looking at his plate. “I don’t know would have become of me, if Riki hadn’t stepped in,” he said, finally.

“It was remarkably brave, that,” Heiku murmured, and the others nodded their agreement.

As if on cue, Riki emerged from the bedroom, looking sleepy and disoriented, his hair sticking out in every direction. His gaze was locked on Iason, as though no one else in the room even existed.

“And here he is, the man himself,” Raoul announced, holding up his glass. “A toast to Riki!”

“To Riki!” the Blondies all raised their glasses, startling him with their loud greeting.

Riki stood for a moment, perplexed, staring at Raoul and then the others, and feeling as though he was still dreaming.

“Come here, love,” Iason said, softly.

Wordlessly, Riki moved toward the Blondie and then slid onto his lap, getting comfortable as Iason wrapped his arms around him.

“Where’s my kiss?” Iason teased, bending down to proffer a cheek.

Riki kissed him, smiling, then turned to regard Raoul again, surprised to find the Blondie looking at him with something almost like affection.

“You were very brave, Riki,” Raoul praised, his eyes shining with respect. “I fear I’ve misjudged you. From now on, I hope there shall be no animosity between us. There will be none, at any rate, on my part.”

“Cool,” Riki replied, a little less eloquently, as he looked around the table. “Is there bacon?”

* * *

The Blondies stayed at the penthouse for several days as if by some unspoken understanding that they belonged together. The crowds that had waited outside the Eos Tower for days eventually dissipated when it became apparent the Blondies were remaining in seclusion.

One afternoon, everyone was gathered in the great hall, Blondies, pets, and eunuchs alike, when Riki suddenly pointed to Katze.

“Hey! I won that bet! That bet we made, remember? Ha ha! Your ass is MINE!”

Katze frowned. “That shouldn’t count. There were...extenuating circumstances.”

“No way, you can’t get out of it now! You made the bet! Paddle-I need a paddle!”

“I have one,” Daryl announced, grinning. “I’ll go get it.”

Katze shot Daryl an angry look. “Traitor!”

“What’s this?” Heiku asked, perking up.

“Katze’s getting paddled,” Riki announced, gleefully. “He lost our bet.”

“What bet was that?” Iason asked, amused by Riki’s excitement and Katze’s obvious mortification.

“He bet that I couldn’t go a day without telling everyone what happened...that one day.” He leaned closer, whispering. “You know, with Vosh.”

At this, the other Blondies took interest.

“And what DID happen, Iason?” Omaki pressed.

“Yes, Iason. Tell us,” Heiku teased. “Although I’m not so sure Raoul wants to know.”

Raoul looked visibly annoyed at this comment, though he feigned disinterest, flipping through the Tanagura Quarterly.

Iason only smiled, but said nothing.

Daryl came running back into the hall with the paddle, handing it to Riki with a delighted grin. “Let him really have it, Riki,” he advised.

“Hey!” Katze protested, giving his lover a dark look.

“What? You DID make the bet, Katze.”

The other eunuchs nodded their agreement.

“Yes, you did,” Ru confirmed.

Now Katze turned to Iason. “Please. Could you...intercede here? Otherwise I’ll never have any authority.”

“If you were foolish enough to make such a bet, you’ll take what’s coming to you,” Iason replied, coolly.

Now Katze, who was usually rather calm and unaffected, no matter what the circumstance, flushed a deep red.

Riki had already positioned himself on the edge of one of the divans, and pointed to his lap. "All right now. Time to take your punishment! And remember...pants down."

Mortified, Katze reluctantly rose to his feet and approached the mongrel, who was smiling at him smugly. "Can't we do this...privately?" he whispered.

This was greeted with shouts of protest from the onlookers, who were all now interested in the unfolding drama.

Riki shrugged, grinning. "Guess not. You heard them. Come on now, stop dallying."

Iason smiled slightly at this, recognizing his own influence on Riki's word choice.

Annoyed, and completely humiliated, Katze unzipped and lowered his pants, reluctantly positioning himself over Riki's knees. The eunuchs and pets giggled at the sight of Katze displayed in such an undignified manner, and Riki simply enjoyed the situation for a moment, twirling the paddle around in his hand. Aki and Suuki, who had been playing elsewhere in the penthouse, now came running into the great hall to see what the commotion was all about, and seemed a little uncertain about the situation, both of them far too familiar with the pain of a paddle to find Katze's predicament amusing.

"You're in for it now," Riki warned. "Now's payback, for all those times you tamed me."

"I was only doing my job," Katze argued.

"You didn't have to be so enthusiastic about it, though."

"Make sure you put your arm into it," Raoul advised, his legs crossed comfortably as he sipped some tea, his chair pushed close to the fire.

"Indeed I shall," Riki replied, again picking up on Iason's manner of speaking.

With that, he brought the paddle down with a mighty whack, eliciting more giggles and snickers. Katze did his best to remain

quiet throughout his tortuous ordeal, but Riki proved to be quite an effective disciplinarian, when put to the test, giving him a paddling that pushed Katze to his limits.

Wincing, he eventually could not help but utter a few small gasps and yelps, much to Riki's delight. "You're feeling that, I think," he taunted. He gave him a few rather sadistic whacks before letting him go, and Katze rose to his feet slowly, his face nearly as red as his ass.

"Well done," Omaki praised. "Who's next?"

"Hey. Bring me that paddle," Heiku demanded, snapping his fingers. "I've got an idea for a game."

The other Blondies groaned at this.

"We hate your games, Heiku," Xian complained.

"Oh come on. Loosen up a bit. This will be fun, I assure you."

"I'm not playing," Raoul announced.

"Nor I," Iason clarified.

"You're all playing. Raoul, I'll even let you be first. Iason, have you a counting sphere?"

Iason sighed. "I suppose I might. Not that I'm playing, mind you."

"Well, have someone get it. We need it to play the game."

"What exactly is the game, Raoul?" Omaki asked, intrigued.

"It's a paddling game. We'll spin the counting sphere to determine how many strikes Raoul gets. He can choose whoever he wants to paddle, and after that, whoever he paddles gets a turn."

Raoul, despite himself, smiled at this, immediately decided who was going to get the force of his arm.

"Very well. Toma, can you bring a counting sphere?"

"I don't know where it is," Toma replied.

"I'll get it," Daryl offered, jumping up.

"Though, as I said, I'm not playing the game," Iason repeated.

"Yes, you are," Raoul countered. "Because I'm going to paddle YOU."

The others all laughed at this, though Iason looked decidedly unamused.

“Come on, Iason. You can take it. Then you get to choose someone to paddle,” Omaki encouraged.

Iason’s gaze instinctively shifted to Megala, who withered a little under his gaze.

“This is a silly game,” Megala announced, hopefully.

“It’s a splendid game! Ah! The counting sphere!” Heiku took the sphere from Daryl, who had come running back into the hall with it, and gave it to Raoul. “Go ahead, Raoul. Give it a spin.”

Raoul did so, and the sphere, floating in midair, spun about madly, beeping. It suddenly stopped, projecting a glowing hologram of the number 3.

A bit disappointed, but determined to make every strike count, Raoul turned to Iason. “Right. On your feet, then.”

Iason, deciding that he would weather three strikes easily enough, obliged him, turning around to offer himself.

“Lean over a bit. Hold onto that chair,” Raoul ordered.

“Give him a good one, Raoul!” Riki encouraged, which earned him a frown from his Master.

“You can count on it.” Then, with both hands firmly holding the paddle, Raoul took a mighty swing, giving Iason a rather loud whack. It stung dreadfully, and Iason bit his lip, though managed not to give any other sign of his discomfort. After receiving two more whacks, Iason turned around, holding out his hand for the paddle.

“Who do you choose, Iason?” Heiku asked. “Megala, is it?”

“No,” Iason replied. “I choose Raoul.”

Raoul frowned at this as the others all laughed at his expression.

“A wise choice! Then, spin the sphere,” Heiku directed, somehow taking it upon himself, as he always did, to direct the flow of the game.

Iason did so, smiling when the sphere stopped at 6. “Your turn, Raoul. Turn around and bend over.”

Yui kept his hand over his mouth to keep from giggling aloud as the great Blondie dutifully positioned himself for his paddling,

looking altogether disgusted with Heiku's paddling game. Iason gave him all six strikes full force, and afterwards, Raoul could not help but give his ass a little rub, wishing for a bit of ice to cool his punished flesh.

He took the paddle from Iason and then turned to Omaki, who had been laughing rather loudly the entire time. "You," he announced, pointing at him with the paddle.

"Oh, if you insist," Omaki laughed, happily jumping to his feet. He rather liked getting a good paddling, and though he would have preferred it coming from Iason, he would definitely take it from Raoul.

"You won't be smiling when I'm through with you," Raoul warned, giving the sphere a rather angry spin.

This time the spinner stopped at 8, and Omaki looked a little less excited about what was in store for him, though he got into position, gripping the back of what had become the paddling game chair as Raoul laid into him.

"Ow," he yelped, after the third whack. "You needn't strike QUITE that hard, Raoul!"

"It's not as amusing when you're taking the paddle, is it?" Raoul taunted.

Xian snorted at this, finding the game, up to this point, utterly delightful. And Aki and Suuki, now feeling safe that the paddling "game" was restricted to the Blondie Masters, were equally enthralled with the game, giggling furiously and jumping up and down with excitement.

After five more merciless strikes, Omaki felt a bit angry, decided to take his wrath out on Xian, who had offered annoying, unhelpful comments throughout his ordeal, such as "Omaki squeals like a female pet," and "clenching your ass like that won't help!"

Xian took seven whacks with the paddle at his hand, his enthusiasm for the game now having been rather spoiled, though the eunuchs and pets continued to be delighted with the game.

"Very good," Heiku announced joyfully. "And who is next, Xian?"

“I’ll tell you who’s next. YOU. You, for this ridiculous game.”

The other Blondies all cheered at this, and when Xian spun a 16 on the sphere, the entire great hall was in an uproar, laughing and clapping at Heiku’s fate. Aki and Suuki were so excited, they ran sporadically around the group, yelling, “Sixteen! Sixteen!”

“The sphere’s defective!” Heiku complained. “It can’t roll a 16!”

“And why not?” Omaki demanded. “16 is a number.”

“It’s supposed to be one through ten!”

“You didn’t specify a 10 count sphere,” Iason pointed out. “It’s a 20-count, and the rest of us took the risk of a high number. Don’t tell me, you intend to back out, when this whole frightfully silly game was your idea?”

Heiku frowned, and, seeing that the entire room was against him, grumpily moved into position. He took the 16 strikes, Xian giving him the full force of his arm, with everyone there shouting the count at each strike, his face deepening to a dark scarlet by the end of his paddling.

“Who’s next, who’s next?” Aki shouted.

Although Heiku was tempted to pay Xian back for his rather brutal enthusiasm, he was privately a little afraid Xian would give him another turn under the paddle, and his ass was burning so dreadfully that he didn’t dare take the risk.

“This was a stupid game,” he muttered, sitting down as gingerly as he could.

“I hate to break up all the fun,” Megala said, a bit nervously, “but I think it’s time I returned to my suite.”

“You lucked out, Megala,” Raoul remarked. “You should have taken a turn under the paddle for withholding more information from us about the hidden passageways in the penthouse.”

“Perhaps we should force him to take a turn,” Xian suggested.

“An excellent idea,” Raoul agreed, nodding.

Megala blushed, not daring to meet Raoul’s gaze.

Omaki laughed. “I don’t think it would have quite the effect you’re hoping for, Raoul. I rather think he’d like being paddled by you.”

The others all snickered at this, and after a few moments, upon seeing that Raoul was not going to seriously carry out his threat, Megala turned to Iason with a slight bow. "Iason. Thank you for your...hospitality."

"Yes, it's been a delight," Xian teased. "We so enjoyed being publicly whipped and then later paddled, for no reason in particular. We shall have to do this again on a regular basis."

"We'll be seeing each other on a regular basis, it seems," Omaki remarked. "Once a week, anyway, to be lectured to death by Headmaster Konami."

"Don't remind me," Raoul groaned.

Now Omaki rose, wincing a little. "I believe I shall take my leave, as well. I'm sure Iason is quite ready to have his penthouse back to himself again."

"Nonsense. You may all stay as long as you like," Iason protested, politely, though privately he was looking forward to being alone with Riki.

"When will you come back?" Aki asked, looking a little sad.

"I shall come by every day, just to see you," he answered, bending down to give him a kiss. "And I expect you to be your best behavior for your new Guardian."

Aki nodded, relieved with Omaki's promise to visit each day. As much as Suuki helped relieve some of his anxiety about his new home, he was a bit uncertain about what things would be like under his Guardian's rule.

The Blondies now all were on their feet, realizing that it was time to depart. None of them were especially looking forward to facing the scrutiny of the Elite community after being so humiliated at the public whipping, but they realized they could not hide in Iason's penthouse forever. Additionally, there was work to be done, for none of them had attended to any of their duties or enterprises for over a week. Their eunuchs and pets were all a little sorry to see the "party" come to an end, but at the same time, it would be good to have the full attention of their Masters in the privacy and familiarity of their own homes.

So, the Blondies and their households gathered up their gift baskets and took their leave, finally giving Iason some peace, for though he was never anything but the most gracious host, he actually preferred the quiet and intimacy of his home without the presence of any guests. He was also anxious for a bit of alone time with Riki, for they had both been too uncomfortable from their injuries to engage in any sort of real sexual contact, and he was now aching to have his pet in his arms.

Aki and Suuki ran off to play in Aki's room, and Iason immediately made for the Master bedroom, giving Riki a smoldering look.

Riki seemed to guess his thoughts, following him wordlessly to the bedroom, where they both undressed, and then got into bed.

"Riki, Riki," Iason sighed, pulling him close. "I love you so very much."

Riki closed his eyes, enjoying the warmth of Iason's naked body against his own. "I love you, too, Iason," he whispered.

"What you did for me," Iason began, then stopped, unable to find the words to express the emotion that suddenly flooded through him. He touched his fingers to the lash-marks on his back. They were now healing nicely, though they would never fully disappear.

"Thanks for not making me go through more Acceleration," Riki whispered. "I know you don't care for the scars."

"You quite misjudge me," Iason replied, smiling. "I love these scars, and would not have them removed for all the world. They are a permanent reminder to me of your sacrifice...and your submission to me."

"My submission? Is that what you think?" Riki frowned. "Iason, I didn't go under the whip out of...some sort of subservience to you. I did it out of love."

Smiling, Iason pulled him closer, pleased with these words. Then, he pushed Riki back onto the bed, moving onto him and kissing him. It was a long, tender, incredibly emotion-filled kiss,

one that communicated all the passion they both felt for one another.

“Oh,” Iason sighed, breaking away. “I’ve missed that, so very much.”

“Me, too,” Riki agreed. “And at the moment my dick’s about to burst.” He took Iason’s hand, guiding him to his engorged cock, and groaning when the Blondie gripped him. “Ahh! Your hand is so warm. But I have to tell you--I don’t think I’m going to last more than a few minutes, here.”

“No matter. I intend to make love to you, over and over,” Iason replied, smiling when Riki ejaculated in his hand. He used the semen to lubricate his own organ, pushing Riki’s legs apart with his knees and entering him from the front as Riki rode the waves of his orgasm.

He gave him a nice little fucking, for all its brevity, for he found that, like Riki, he had gone far too long without release to prolong matters for any length of time. He gave into his desire, shuddering as he climaxed, and relishing his pet’s inner embrace.

His pet. His extraordinary, passionate little mongrel, finally tamed, and finally, by Jupiter’s decree, to be his forever. He savored the moment, whispering Riki’s name over and over as he kissed his neck and shoulders, feeling as though he could not be happier than he was at that moment.

They loved each other for hours, each feeling as though he could not quite get enough of the other, neither one of them wanting to leave the bed, even for a moment, as they shared what could only be described as the most intimate moments they had ever experienced together, their hearts as entangled as their bodies, and their minds, united as one.

* * *

Some days had gone by, and things had shifted back into a state of normalcy. Riki was bored, for Iason had shut himself up in

the library to get some work finished, and so he watched Daryl at the computer, where he was setting up Aki's signature access profile.

"What are you doing, exactly?" he asked, after a moment.

"Just inputting Aki into the system. So that the doors will open for him."

"Oh yeah?" Riki suddenly looked interested, peering over his shoulder at the computer screen. "Am I in there?"

"Daryl!" Toma called, from the guest wing. "Can you help me with something?"

"I'll be right back," Daryl said. "Don't even think of messing with your profile, Riki. I'll be sure to check it as soon as I get back."

"Sheesh. Give me some credit," he shot back. "I'm not THAT stupid."

"Hmmm." Daryl gave him a pointed look before rushing out of the hall.

Now a mischievous smile pressed onto the mongrel's face as he studied the computer screen. "Let's see," he whispered.

"What are doing?" Aki whispered back, excited. "You're going to get in trouble!"

"Don't worry. This will be great." He found what he was looking for, and with a tap on the computer screen, made a slight alteration to Iason's access profile. He looked at Aki, raising his eyebrows and then pressing a finger to his lips.

Aki put his hand over his mouth, giggling. Though he wasn't entirely sure what he'd done, he knew that whatever it was, it was sure to be entertaining. Aki had come to almost worship Riki, and the mongrel, surprisingly, found that he liked the boy's attention. He'd developed a nightly routine of telling him stories of his life back in Midas, which Aki eagerly listened to, interrupting him constantly with questions, which Riki found flattering. It was fun to have someone "look up" to him, and Riki found that Aki rather reminded him of how he had once been, as a boy.

Daryl returned to the hall, looking at Riki suspiciously. He examined the mongrel's security profile, but finding nothing altered, proceeded to shut down the program, retiring to his room.

Riki waited for a few moments before calling for Iason, warning Aki not to give away his secret. "We're going to play a little joke on Iason," he whispered. Aki struggled to keep a straight face, delighted with the idea of playing a "joke" on his Guardian, though he had no idea what it was.

Annoyed, because he had specifically forbade interruption, Iason emerged from the library, standing in the doorway with one hand on his hip. "What is it, Riki? I told you I was not to be bothered."

"Oh! Sorry. I just wanted to tell you, that one vase--that orange one in your room? The...Spaghetti thing? I broke it. Sorry about that."

For a moment, Iason said nothing, his face darkening. He was speechless, striding toward his bedroom. Surely, Riki hadn't truly broken another priceless Vergatti! He was so preoccupied with his vase that he failed to respond in time when the door to his bedroom didn't hum open, as it usually did on his approach. He collided into the door, and the expression of utter surprise on the great Blondie's face was so funny that Aki fell onto the floor, giggling hysterically.

Iason spun around. "Riki!" he shouted, furious.

Riki grinned and then darted out of the hall, running down the guest wing. Iason paused only long enough to open the door and check on the status of his vase and then, seeing that the Vergatti was still intact, he smiled, relaxing a bit and enjoying his pet's joke. He took off after him, catching up with him in the pool area and grabbing him from behind, as Riki squealed, laughing.

Iason held him tightly from behind. "Naughty pet," he whispered, though couldn't help but smile. He found he was rather delighted with Riki's playfulness--and of course, rather relieved his Vergatti hadn't truly been destroyed.

"That was great!" Riki proclaimed. "You should have seen the look on your face!"

"How shall I punish you?" Iason whispered, nibbling his earlobe. "I can't quite decide."

“Oh, come on. I took the whip for you, I ought to have immunity from all future punishment!”

At this, Iason closed his eyes, suddenly overcome with emotion. “Oh, Riki. You...are so precious to me.”

“If I’m so precious,” Riki challenged, “how about you get me that Zerovian like you promised?”

Iason smiled. “We shall go out today and you may pick one out, if you like.”

“Really? Awesome! I want...a silver one!”

Now Iason kissed his neck, his hands sliding down his hips. “But first, get undressed. Let’s take a little dip in the pool.”

“Yeah, okay,” Riki replied, breathing a little harder as Iason slid his hand over his groin.

In the next moment they were both in the pool, enjoying the warm water and the intimacy of being naked and wet together. Iason cornered Riki, pushing him up against the side of the pool, his erection hard against the mongrel’s thigh.

“You look sexy when you’re wet,” Riki whispered, his voice a bit husky from lust.

Iason answered this by prodding his mouth open with a forceful, deliberately languid kiss, his tongue twirling round and round, his hands moving slowly down Riki’s body, under the water. “I love you with my whole heart,” he whispered. “And I shall have you with me now, forever.”

“I love you, too, Iason,” the mongrel murmured. “Though don’t expect me to tell you that all the time. It bothers me, trying to cram a thousand emotions into a few words. But now you know I love you, or I wouldn’t have stood in for you.”

Iason smiled. “And now even Jupiter respects you. How does it feel to be an A-class pet?”

Riki shrugged. “I actually don’t get what the big deal is about. I mean, nothing’s really changed for me. I’m a pet. I’m...nobody.”

The Blondie frowned at this, tilting Riki’s chin up with a finger when the mongrel looked down. “You’re my pet,” he clarified. “And that makes you somebody.”

“Uh huh.”

Now Iason studied him, feeling suddenly, inexplicably, sad.
“What is it, Riki?”

“It’s just...well, you wouldn’t understand. I want you to look at me...not just as a pet. But as a lover. As a man...in my own right.”

“But I do, Riki,” Iason protested. “You don’t think I do?”

“You just told me I was somebody because I was your pet. That says it all, right there.”

Iason’s brow furrowed as he thought about this for a moment.
“I didn’t mean it like that.”

“Would you still love me if I wasn’t your pet?”

“Riki, I will always love you. I love you, despite you’re being my pet, even though it nearly cost me everything.”

At this, Riki softened a bit, smiling. “Yeah, okay. I see your point.”

“Good.” Iason kissed him again, this time a little more passionately, almost desperately.

He made love to Riki there in the water, encouraging his sex cries with his own moans, and feeling as though he was straining toward something he could not quite reach, even when his rapture spilled out from him in erratic bursts of sweetness. The Blondie could not quite shake the sorrow that had somehow spoiled his good mood; it moved insidiously into his heart, spreading through his entire being.

Iason took Riki out that very afternoon, as promised, to purchase his new car, smiling at his pet’s transparent excitement as he ran around the Zerovian hovercraft, peering into the windows. The merchant was equally excited, for it was not often that the pricey vehicle left his showroom, and on top of that, it was being sold to the famous pet of Iason Mink. Already the presence of the Head of the Syndicate had generated a crowd of onlookers, who watched the transaction through the window with interest, and perhaps a bit of envy.

Odi and Ayuda had both accompanied them, and seemed a little nervous about all the attention they were getting, refusing to

let anyone enter the store while Iason and Riki were within. But there wasn't much they could do when it was time to leave. There was no way to get the vehicle out of the showroom other than to drive it out, and so the immense sliding glass doors opened, allowing the crowd to move inside. Now their path out of the store was blocked, and Riki got out of his vehicle, annoyed.

"Hey! Move out of the way!" he yelled. "And don't touch the vehicle!"

And then suddenly, out of nowhere, Guy was standing before Riki, with a laser pointed directly at him.

"This is for Kei," he hissed.

Riki, though surprised, hadn't lost his street instincts, and managed to dodge aside, just barely missing the laser beam. And in the next instant, Guy cried out, falling to his knees, blood dripping down between his legs.

Ayuda and Odi had both fired on him, and the wounds were fatal; Guy fell back, the life slipping away from him.

"Guy!" Riki cried, rushing to his side. "Oh Guy!" The mongrel found himself weeping, staring down at the face of his old lover, who looked up at him with a look of surprise to see him crying.

"Riki," he whispered. "Why? Why did you kill Kei?"

"It was an accident! I didn't mean to hurt him, Guy. I swear! I would never do that to you!"

Guy struggled to hang onto his life, gasping. "Accident?"

Riki held his hand, pleading with him not to die. "Hang on! Help is coming!"

Guy squeezed his hand, looking into his eyes, and in that moment Riki thought he saw a hint of forgiveness, but the look faded, along with the man, who died as he watched helplessly, in horror and despair.

He wept, not even aware of what was going on around him. When Iason finally knelt down and tried to persuade him to stand up, he could only throw himself in the Blondie's arms, his body shaking as he sobbed. Iason comforted him as best he could, holding him close, but he was perplexed by the pet's emotion,

suddenly feeling as though, perhaps, he did not truly know Riki's heart at all.

Riki pulled away, looking up at him, the tears still streaming down his cheeks. "Please. Can we take him away from here? They'll come and take him...I know what they do to mongrels...they'll throw him into Manatung Bay. Please. He deserves better than that."

Iason paused a moment, then nodded. "Very well." He slipped off his cloak, wrapping it around Guy's lifeless form, and picked him up, laying him down in the back of the vehicle.

Riki was too distraught to drive, and sat in the back with Guy.

"Where should we take him? Back to Ceres?" Iason asked, as he started the generator.

"No," Riki whispered. "He should be...with Kei. Let's take him to the ocean. Where you found me...that day."

Iason nodded, and they made the journey in silence, but for Riki's weeping. When they got to the ocean, Iason helped carry him to the water's edge.

Riki held out his arms. "Give him to me now."

The Blondie placed the body in his arms, and Riki carried him into the sea, his heart heavy. "I'm so sorry, Guy," he whispered. "But you and Kei...perhaps you can find one another, now."

With that, he gently dropped him into the water, watching for a few moments until he could no longer see his face. Then he turned and slowly made his way back to the beach, where Iason stood, waiting.

"You're cold," he observed, worried, putting his arms around his shivering pet. "We need to get you someplace warm." Iason looked around, realizing suddenly that they were not far from his villa, a place he had never before taken his pet. Now, he realized, was the perfect time.

Riki seemed to go limp in his arms, and Iason, with one easy movement, picked him up and carried him to the car, carefully setting him down in the seat. He had never seen his pet quite so distraught, and he found he could hardly bear it. He wondered

about Riki's feelings for Guy, and his reaction to the mongrel's death.

Within moments they were at the villa. Iason carried him inside, pleased to see the place was in perfect condition. He kept the villa well-stocked, and had it cleaned every week, despite the fact that he rarely spent time there.

He carried Riki into the bedroom and undressed him, drying his wet body off and then wrapping him in a warm blanket, and then started the fire there in the room. Then he got into bed with him, putting his arms around him and pulling him close. They lay together thus for a long time, saying nothing.

Finally, Iason could not help but ask that which was weighing on his heart. "Did you love him so much?" he whispered, sadly.

Riki shook his head. "It's not that. It's just so very sad. Guy...and Kei. And I feel like...part of me died. We grew up together, you know. He was...a good friend, even before we became lovers. Everything got all fucked up. I feel like...my whole world, everything I once knew, is gone."

Iason was silent, reflecting on this. He continued to brood, even after Riki had drifted off to sleep in his arms. He was thinking, also, about the comments he had made earlier that day, in the pool.

He decided that, in the end, what he wanted most was for Riki to be happy.

When Riki woke, he found Iason gone, and he looked around, disoriented, wondering where he was, and only vaguely remembering arriving there the day before. He managed to find the bath hall, where he freshened up, then found his clothes lying out by the fire. He dressed, and then went in search of Iason.

He walked around the villa, marveling at its opulence, but nothing could have prepared him for what he encountered next, in the center of the palatial dwelling. It was a circular enclosure, walled off from the rest of the villa by glass. Within was a garden--an immense, indoor, walk-through garden, filled with weeping cherry trees. He searched for the entrance and finally found it, then stepped inside.

He noticed an immediate change in the temperature--it was warmer. Overhead, was a roof of arching glass, so that the entire garden was self-contained. Some sort of breeze had been generated, and the cherry blossoms swirled around him as he walked.

Iason was sitting on a bench near a small pond, and he smiled as Riki approached. "Feeling better?" he asked.

"This is...amazing. Hey! There are birds in here! Pretty yellow and blue ones!"

"Yes, those are very rare. They're imported from Aristia."

"Where are we exactly?"

"This is my villa."

"Wow. I can't believe this is...inside the building." A butterfly landed on Riki's arm and then fluttered away.

"Riki. Come here."

The mongrel sat down on the bench beside him. "Why didn't you bring me here before?"

"I'm not sure," Iason replied.

"I love it."

The Blondie sighed. "Riki. I so want you to be happy."

"Huh? Hey! I just saw...a red butterfly! I've never seen one of those before!" He jumped up and started after it, but was stopped by Iason, who grabbed his arm and stood up.

"Riki, I'm trying to tell you something."

"Um, okay." Riki gazed up at him, his dark eyes wide.

Iason struggled with his emotions, finding what he was about to do suddenly almost physically painful. "I want you to be happy," he repeated. "Because I do love you. And not just because you are my pet. Because you are Riki, who I love with my entire being. And so, my love, I am going to give you what you have asked me for all along. I am setting you free."

Riki was so surprised by this announcement that he could only stare back in disbelief.

"You can...go, if you want. Back to Ceres. Whatever it is that makes you happy."

"Iason," he breathed. "You're setting me free?"

“Yes,” the Blondie replied, unable to conceal his sorrow.

At that moment, Riki felt as though the chains that had bound him to Iason had broken away. Now, all that kept him standing there was his love for the great Blondie, a love that, he found, was far stronger than any chains, or by his status as a pet.

“What makes me happy,” Riki replied, “is that you are willing to set me free. But Iason, where would I go? I belong with you. I love you, and I want to be with you.”

“Oh Riki,” Iason whispered, his eyes filling with tears. “Do you mean it? Do you?”

“I told you so, didn’t I?”

“But, understand, love, if you stay with me--you must stay as my pet. Jupiter wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Riki smiled. “I know. But I’m an A-class pet, right?”

Iason embraced him then, holding him so tightly that Riki was forced to protest.

“You’re going to squeeze the life out of me!”

“I’m sorry,” Iason answered, immediately loosening his hold. “I am just...you make me so happy, Riki. Then you’re truly going to stay with me?”

“Yes,” Riki answered, smiling. “As long as you promise to make me breakfast.”

The cherry blossoms swirled around them as they embraced, their kiss as passionate and sweet as their love, which was now given freely by both, without hesitation or restraint, pride, or selfish wanting, but out of selfless sacrifice and caring--perfect, as much as anything can be perfect--and healing, like the comforting warmth of a beautiful dream.

THE END